

MODERN DRAMA

VOLUME 3

DECEMBER, 1960

NUMBER 3

Table of Contents

O'Neill, 1960	EDWIN A. ENGEL	219
<i>Dynamo and Lazarus Laughed: Some</i> Limitations	CARL E. W. L. DAHLSTRÖM	224
O'Neill: The Power of Daring	NORMAN CHAITIN	231
The Psychoanalyzing of Eugene O'Neill	ARTHUR A. NETHERCOT	242
<i>Mourning Becomes Electra and The Prodigal:</i> Electra and Orestes	PHILIP WEISSMAN	257
Eugene O'Neill and <i>Light on the Path</i>	DORIS M. ALEXANDER	260
O'Neill's Dreamer: Success and Failure	JANIS KLAVSONS	268
O'Neill and the Comic Spirit	DREW B. PALLETTE	273
The Worth of <i>Ah, Wilderness!</i>	JACOB H. ADLER	280
The Road to Ruin: The Beginning of O'Neill's Long Day's Journey	JOHN T. SHAWCROSS	289
<i>Amor Fati: O'Neill's Lazarus as Superman and Savior</i>	CYRUS DAY	297
Notes on Eugene O'Neill in Japan	HORST FRENZ	306
Dialogue in the Plays of Eugene O'Neill	SIGNI FALK	314
<i>Desire Under the Elms: A Modern Tragedy</i>	SOPHUS KEITH WINTHER	326

Note

Our next special issue (December, 1961) will be concerned with Synge and O'Casey. The deadline for submission of manuscripts for this issue is September 1, 1961.

The Contributors

- EDWIN A. ENGEL. Professor Engel is a member of the Department of English, University of Michigan. He is the author of *The Haunted Heroes of Eugene O'Neill*.
- CARL E. W. L. DAHLSTRÖM. Author of *Strindberg's Dramatic Expressionism*, Professor Dahlström is a member of the English Department at Portland State College.
- NORMAN C. CHAITIN. Mr. Chaitin is a playwright and director residing in New York.
- ARTHUR H. NETHERCOT. Professor of English at Northwestern University, Mr. Nethercot is the author of *Men and Supermen: The Shavian Portrait Gallery*. The first volume of his two-volume biography, *The First Five Lives of Annie Besant*, was published earlier this year.
- PHILIP WEISSMAN, M.D. Dr. Weissman, a practicing psychoanalyst of the New York Psychoanalytic Institute Treatment Center, is the author of several studies on creative imagination in the theater.
- DORIS M. ALEXANDER. Miss Alexander is a member of the English Department at Staten Island Community College. Her biography of Eugene O'Neill will be published by Harcourt, Brace and Company in the fall of 1961.
- JANIS KLAVSONS. Mr. Klavsons is a graduate student at the University of Minnesota. "O'Neill's Dreamer" is his first published article.
- DREW B. PALLETTE. Professor Pallette is Chairman of the Committee on Graduate Studies in English at the University of Southern California. He has published a number of articles on the theater and on dramatists from Lillo to Fry.
- JACOB H. ADLER. Associate Professor of English at the University of Kentucky, Mr. Adler has published several articles on drama in various periodicals. He is Fulbright lecturer in India for the academic year 1960-1961.
- JOHN T. SHAWCROSS. Mr. Shawcross is Associate Professor of English at Newark College of Engineering.
- CYRUS DAY. Professor of English at the University of Delaware, Mr. Day has edited *Songs of John Dryden* and *Songs of Thomas D'Urfey*. Readers of *Modern Drama* will remember his "The Iceman and the Bridegroom" which appeared in our first issue.
- HORST FRENZ. Professor of English and Chairman of the Comparative Literature Program at the University of Indiana, Mr. Frenz has published widely in the area of modern drama.
- SIGNI FALK. Associate Professor of English at Coe College, Iowa, Miss Falk has published articles in the *AAUP Bulletin*, *College English*, and *Modern Language Notes*.
- SOPHUS KEITH WINTHER. Professor of English, University of Washington. His *O'Neill—A Critical Study* led to a close friendship with O'Neill that covered a period of twenty years.

O'NEILL, 1960

I COME TO PRAISE O'NEILL, not to bury him. Not only is he more alive today than he was a decade or two ago, he stands a better chance for immortality now than he did in those days when intimations thereof were strong—that is, during that score of years beginning at Provincetown in 1916 and ending at Stockholm in 1936. His last plays, composed around 1940, have crowned the distinguished earlier career, not only culminating but surpassing (in depth, power, truth) the pieces which earned him his original reputation.

By American standards that reputation was surely justified. No other native playwright had been at once so skillful, original, exciting, prolific. None had been so bold, uncompromising, influential. Now, after some thirty years, one is further impressed by discerning a pattern in the earlier plays, a tendency obscured perhaps by infusions of psychology and sex, by theatrical gimmicks. I mean the religious element. Beginning about 1922 O'Neill wrote play after play of personal suffering, passionate intensity, religious aspiration—allegorical works, dramas of conversion, apocalyptic plays. The serious playwright "must dig at the roots of the sickness of today," O'Neill announced, a sickness which he traced to "the death of the old God and the failure of science and materialism to give any satisfying new One for the surviving religious instinct to find a meaning for life in and to comfort its fears of death with." Digging at his own roots, describing his own symptoms, he pursued strange gods. One, the contrary of his own temperament, was the embodiment of those affirmative qualities which O'Neill so desperately lacked. This was, of course, Nietzsche's Dionysus. O'Neill had become a disciple of Nietzsche and from him learned not only to substitute Dionysus for Christ but also the satyr for the ape. In this way he temporarily answered his objections to modern Christianity and to scientific Darwinism. From Nietzsche he learned, further, to urge struggle in place of resignation, ecstasy in place of apathy, affirmation of life in place of denial. Moreover, he now found it possible to transfigure into mystic vision and rapture his old formula for survival: dope-dream and drunkenness.

Thus, beneath the naturalistic surface of *Desire Under the Elms* lies a pagan substratum. The characters, New England farmers of 1850, belong to the animal kingdom but no longer resemble the ape. The Jehovah-like old father bears aspects of the satyr. The voluptuous and maternal young wife suggests the earth-mother, even a cow-headed goddess of fertility and maternity. The son, who also displays aspects of bovinity, repeats a familiar primordial pattern of behavior by seeking

to depose the father in order to gain the mother. By the time the play ends, the most horrible crimes have been committed: adultery, incest, infanticide, attempted patricide. But having gone "beyond good and evil" O'Neill had his characters say "Yes" to all their sins. As the curtain falls, son and mother-mistress stand together defiant and exalted "in attitudes strangely aloof and devout."

In two plays, *The Great God Brown* and *Lazarus Laughed*, O'Neill's discipleship to Nietzsche is directly evident. In the former O'Neill depicted the conflict between what he described as the "creative pagan acceptance of life" and the "masochistic, life-denying spirit of Christianity," a struggle which occurs in the soul of the protagonist whose name, Dion Anthony—Dionysus and Saint Anthony—is symbolic of the antithetical forces. The Great God Pan is dead and has been replaced by the bourgeois Christian ideal represented by the commonplace Brown. Once again the Earth Mother—this time a prostitute named Cybel[e]—is at hand to succor the suffering hero. As he dies in her arms he experiences mystic union with God, a God neither of wrath nor of love, but of laughter. Cybel standing "like an idol of earth," exultantly proclaims the eternal return of life, a doctrine which Nietzsche regarded as "the highest formula of affirmation that can ever be attained." The theme of *Lazarus Laughed* once again is affirmation of life, denial—non-existence—of death. Lazarus, returned from his tomb, is Dionysus, and if the Jews and the Christians are not aware of his identity, the Greeks are. As O'Neill represents him he is a hybrid deity—Christ crowned, not with thorns, but with vine leaves. He is Nietzsche's laughing God, but at the same time tender, loving, almost maternal. The tragedy of the play is the tragedy of life: man's fear of death, the source of all evil, which renders him incapable of experiencing the love, peace, primordial harmony, which come from that faith in eternal life which Lazarus preaches. Such higher life is still beyond men, "those haunted heroes who still need their swords to slash at ghosts in the dark." *Lazarus Laughed* culminated O'Neill's attempt to revive the pagan way of life. Resuming his nay-saying tendency, he nevertheless continued his search for a satisfying new God.

Although he dispensed with Dionysus, O'Neill retained the Earth Mother, but divested Her of Her pagan aspects. He had the heroine of *Strange Interlude* refuse "to pray to the modern science God," lament that "God was created in a male image," and then conclude that God ought to have been a Mother. For such a deity would not only be the source of life, She would be tender, loving, protective, immediate, and ubiquitous. Unfortunately, life being what it is—destitute of faith, void of lasting fulfillments, tortured by thoughts of encroaching old age and death—O'Neill's heroine withdraws as the play nears its end into a state

of suspended animation, of peaceful dreaming and drifting. Continuing to speculate about the possibility of transforming God into a Mother, O'Neill wrote his trilogy, *Mourning Becomes Electra*, in which he interpolated the Mother Myth into the Greek story of the Atrides. He wished, he said, "to develop a tragic expression in terms of transfigured modern values and symbols." The values are love and peace, their only source being the Mother, to whom most of the symbols then refer. The theme of *Mourning Becomes Electra* is man's yearning throughout his "death-in-life"—a life perverted by the worship of God the Father—for "death-birth-peace," the benefit to be had by worshipping God the Mother. A crime is a crime only when it is perpetrated against the Mother. When She—the counterpart of Clytemnestra—commits an offense, the Father is to blame, even though he be the victim. In a larger sense the trilogy is concerned with what Schopenhauer called "the crime of existence itself," death being, according to O'Neill, not only redemption but release—a return to the Mother.

O'Neill paused briefly in 1934 as if he were atoning for his earlier sinful paganism, for his pursuit of strange gods. As the curtain falls on *Days Without End* the hero stands "with his arms stretched up to the Cross" and "exaltedly" proclaims that "Death is dead," that "Life laughs with God's love again!"—a proclamation which many people took to mean that O'Neill had returned to the Church. Before the world learned that he had not, he was to receive, two years later, the Nobel Prize and then remain off-stage for ten years, "buried alive in oblivion." That decade was the period during which O'Neill, afflicted with spiritual and physical illness, depressed by personal and world disaster, composed his last plays—among which in my opinion, are the two best American plays ever written.

O'Neill had ceased his energetic digging, his unrelenting quest. From the heights of *Lazarus Laughed* he descended at last to the depths of *The Iceman Cometh*. Where the theater had been a temple for the celebration of a new religion, it became a refuge for sodden human derelicts. The erstwhile Bacchic reveler became the solitary drinker; apocalyptic fervor became drunken stupor. Death is the theme in both plays, *Lazarus* being a denial of death, *The Iceman*, an acceptance of it—the rehearsal of O'Neill's own death, in Boston, a few years later. *Lazarus* is an ambitious, pretentious, turgid piece, essentially contradictory to O'Neill's true nature; whereas *The Iceman* presents O'Neill, "the thing itself: unaccommodated man." In *The Iceman* he returned to his early formula for survival: dream and drunkenness. Insulated against life, his characters find the peace and comfort which normal human depravity requires. Abstinence brings turmoil, death. O'Neill had written other plays, long before, whose theme was the "sustaining lie," but he

was not stopping there now. *The Iceman* expresses the illusory quality of faith, hope, love, truth; the irreconcilability of love and peace (recall *Mourning Becomes Electra*); and develops the theme which preoccupied O'Neill at the time: how to die. The character Larry Slade, protagonist and chorus, is the counterpart of the playwright himself. Similar in age, appearance, and temperament, author and character face the same dilemma. They are, as Larry confesses, "afraid to live" and "even more afraid to die." The dilemma is resolved at last when Larry discovers that he, like the other derelicts, was after all addicted to the pipe dream: the illusion that he was not afraid to die. Admitting this to himself, he adds to dream and drunkenness a third way to peace, death.

The Iceman Cometh, a bold, bitter, powerful work, unique in the theater, gave ample evidence that O'Neill's spiritual depression and physical affliction had not destroyed his creative gift. On the other hand, it seemed that its utter dejection must now bring the curtain down on his career, absolute pessimism being the negation of all activity. For forty years O'Neill had been obsessed with death, and at last had come to terms with it. *The Iceman*, thus, was a play of self-discovery. Off with lendings, masks, illusions. And it was, of course, essentially autobiographical as were, for example, *The Straw*, *Welded*, *The Great God Brown*, *Days Without End*.

In *Long Day's Journey Into Night* O'Neill was enabled, as he said in the dedication, "to face [his] dead at last," to write about himself, his mother, father, and brother. What he disclosed about himself was not new. What he told about his family was new only in part. Intensely interesting though it is, the autobiographical aspect of the play is not its primary attraction. Most significant is the fact that it was written "with deep pity and understanding and forgiveness." In short, it was an act of love. And this was achieved without violating any profound previous convictions, without contradicting earlier views, without retracting former statements, without resorting to specious transfiguration. No longer cold, wooden, remote abstractions, the characters are concrete and tragically human.

The portrait of Edmund, the playwright as a young man, is a replica of familiar O'Neillian heroes early and late. Like Smitty of *The Moon of the Caribbees*, he is a melancholy, self-pitying inebriate. Like Robert Mayo of *Beyond the Horizon* and Stephen Murray of *The Straw*, he is a victim of tuberculosis. Like Michael Cape of *Welded*, he is suicidal because he finds life "intolerably insulting." Like Dion Anthony of *The Great God Brown*, he is a forlorn, mocking ironist. Like Richard Miller of *Ah, Wilderness!*, he is an irreverent adolescent, given to quoting Victorian poetry. Like John Loving of *Days Without End*, he is the skeptical son of Catholic parents. Like Larry Slade of *The Iceman*, he is a

purgatorial ghost, paying off sins that he never committed. Like all of these, he is "forever a stranger who never feels at home, who does not really want and is not really wanted, who can never belong, who must always be a little in love with death!" But like few of them, he has "the motive and the cue for passion." His tragic situation moves us to pity, somewhat less to fear. For we know that after the final curtain Edmund-Eugene recovered his health after six months in a sanatorium and went on to success and fame, both in spite of, and because of his handicaps.

The other members of the family excite both pity and fear. The father, up to a point a facsimile of the many fathers with whom O'Neill had dealt so harshly in the past, is raised at last to something human and pitiful, a tragic figure rather than a one-dimensional embodiment of evil. Whereas the father is forgiven, the mother is not quite; for she remains an enigma to O'Neill. The three male Tyrones watch with guilt, disgust, dismay as she sets out early in the morning on her "long day's journey into night," a ghost-like figure slowly disappearing into the fog of morphine addiction, of dope-dream and oblivion; while they, drinking heavily of whiskey, accompany her up to midnight, at which point they must look on helplessly as she moves beyond reach. "It's as if, in spite of loving us, she hated us!" says Edmund. It seems to him that she takes morphine only for its effect, deliberately to create "a bank of fog in which she hides and loses herself . . . to get beyond our reach, to be rid of us, to forget we're alive!" Like the bottom of the sea in *The Iceman Cometh*, the fog is a symbol of peace, a refuge for those who must escape not only from life but from love. Jamie, the dissolute older brother, also mystifies O'Neill, but we infer that Jamie drinks for the same reason that the mother takes morphine: the tragic defect of love. This is the rock upon which the family has foundered.

Prior to *The Iceman Cometh* O'Neill had always felt that love was the prime component of faith. He had his characters plead for love, profess it, pursue it, but seldom experience it in any but the most elemental or immature way. His heroes, at odds with the world, sought the remoteness of the cosmos, the protection of the womb, the anonymity of the grave. In their self-obsession they were actually indifferent to the suffering of other men, although they avowed their love for Man. The triumph of *Long Day's Journey Into Night* was the consequence of O'Neill's emergence from the fog, of his ascent from the bottom of the sea, long enough to give love an ascendancy over peace and to find it in his heart to absolve his misbegotten family. The play is one of self-discovery and of spiritual victory. It is at once O'Neill's most religious play and his most genuine tragedy.

EDWIN A. ENGEL

DYNAMO AND LAZARUS LAUGHED

SOME LIMITATIONS

READERS OF O'NEILL eventually develop an awareness of the dramatist's limitations. *Lazarus Laughed* and *Dynamo* are two plays that contribute to such awareness, for one reads and rereads them with a feeling of growing dissatisfaction. In both works O'Neill seems to have grasped raw materials which are of great importance, concerned as he is with religion, science, sex, man's fear of death, and the human incapacity for a life of good will. In neither play, however, is he able to give artistic body to the potentials of the raw materials he has selected.

In *Lazarus Laughed* the vehicle for O'Neill's presentation of the human situation is the story of Lazarus after he has been restored to life by Jesus. The dramatist places particular stress on the haunting fear of death that is responsible for the fear of life and hence also for man's inability to translate meanings and values into social practices. The resurrected man proclaims the death of death. There is no death, he says; God's laughter alone prevails in the universe. The followers of Lazarus therefore dance and sing and laugh their way through life; that is, they so respond as long as their leader is with them. Regardless of circumstances, Lazarus himself remains controlled and unswerving in his affirmation of being: "Yes! Yes!! Yes!!! Men die! Even a Son of Man must die to show men that Man may live! But there is no death!" After the execution, his second death, Lazarus calls back reassuringly, "There is no death!"

While *Lazarus Laughed* is called "A Play for an Imaginative Theatre," *Dynamo* is apparently intended for the realistic stage. The human enterprises of religion and science are represented by two men, the Reverend Hutchins Light and Ramsay Fife, superintendent of a hydro-electric plant. The clergyman and the practical engineer are petty men wholly lacking intellectual and spiritual insights. Fife is cheap and brutal in his humor; Light is superstitious and patently unchristian in his anger. Each man happens to be the parent of one child. Reuben, the son of the Reverend Light, and Ada, the daughter Ramsay Fife, are adolescents who have just begun to be attracted to each other. The engineer, greatly disliking the developing relations of the young people, uses his daughter in an intrigue by means of which he exposes Reuben's weak character and also places the clergyman in a most embarrassing position. The drama concentrates attention on Reuben. As he is torn by mother love, sexual desire, a struggle for independence, a guilt complex,

and superstitions regarding both religion and science, the emotional disturbance common to adolescence is transformed into an active insanity. Frustrated in his efforts to experience a miracle with the dynamo, a miracle which he said would change the world into a paradise, Reuben shoots his sweetheart and then commits suicide.

In our search for flaws which reveal O'Neill's limitations, we shall be able to give but brief consideration to a few phases of the cultural atmosphere which dominated the entire body of the artist's work. When we think of human enterprises like religion and science, we recall that from the Renaissance to the present the dicta of religion have steadily been yielding authority to the pronouncements of science. This has occurred despite frequent reinterpretations of scriptures and restatement of position. Since men almost invariably identify religion and the practices of the religious organizations, and also identify science and technological applications, they have rarely been able to think clearly about either phase of the cultural complex. The consequence has been that religion and science have been placed in an either-or situation or else they have been treated as essentially identical. Men supposedly cannot respond to both as distinct enterprises; so they are required to surrender the one in favor of the other or else to equate the two.

The views are, of course, wholly untenable when we think of religion as an enterprise devoted to human meanings and values, and science as an enterprise devoted to the factual understanding of the continuum of occurrence. When we realize that the essential business of religion is the formulation of meanings and values and their translation into practices of living whereas the essential business of science is the accumulation and ordering of objective fact, we note that the two represent different areas of human endeavor. The confusion of the either-or situation or of identity is then dispelled by the rationale of the both-and situation.

O'Neill seemingly does not grasp religion and science as two separate enterprises. Rather he sees them from within the respective institutions and regards them as absolutes. Since there can be but one absolute, a choice has to be made, and in *Lazarus Laughed* the choice is for the view of evolutionary processes as the prime expression of science. Thus all manifestations in the universe are forms of star dust, ranging from simple to complex designs. Although individual occurrences are eventually resolved into dust, a general pattern persists in the chain of succession. Lazarus tells us repeatedly that individual human beings die but Man survives. In *Dynamo* Reuben breaks down under his rejection of the institutionalized religion of his fathers and his endeavor to worship a God of scientific determination. He presumably is a victim of the religious training given him. Actually, however, the boy understands

neither religion nor science, for the two are taken as absolutes. It is difficult for a critic to suppress the suggestion that O'Neill himself suffers from the same kind of confusion and is also victimized by it. In both plays he fails to master his materials and is instead overwhelmed by them. In the specious battle of absolutes, O'Neill clearly has no respect for institutionalized religion and he has no informed convictions about science. He is in the position of a man who is greatly disturbed about the human situation and desperately wants to speak but is incapable of meaningful articulation.

In *Lazarus Laughed* more than in *Dynamo* we become aware of the problem of existence that lies behind the plays. Religion and science both offer particular ways of life. The way of life in religion is usually conceived as a continuity of being. The soul of a man precedes his biological birth and continues after his death either as an independent essence or else as a being that survives in the generations sprung from his own loins. In such a perspective the individual man has significance and duration. His existence has meaning because of its relations with God, an All-Soul, or the Being that accompanies a man's blood in the unbroken chain of life. In this dualism it is true that the individual body may perish and return to dust, but the soul is deemed immortal, and thus a man's being is maintained forever. Whatever vagrant fears he may entertain, he is nevertheless assured that the essential part of him will endure. Indeed, even if he is consigned eternally to a torturing hell, he will always have being; he will not be blotted out of the book of existence.

The way of life in science has nothing whatsoever to do with souls. Like all other phenomena in the universe human beings are fluxive forms of primary materials. In the scientific perspective the elemental stuff alone has duration; that is, continuity is characteristic solely of the primary building materials, whatever they may be. All that which is in form—animate or inanimate, ephemerid or galaxy—is in flux and hence of limited duration. Science has no factual classes of human meanings and values; it is not in the least concerned with them, regardless of the extrascientific concerns of scientists. It has facts only about objective manifestations in the continuum of occurrence. In this area of experience, a man's individual existence is of no special significance, for in relation to the incalculably large number of items in the universe, a human being is just another minuscule arrangement of molecules.

O'Neill was doing his creative work in a period when men in ever-growing numbers were rejecting religious dualism in favor of scientific monism, and many were unaware of the fact that they were surrendering their independent souls, their continuity, and thus also their sense of being. The comfortable feeling of duration gradually gave way to a

recognition of transitoriness, and significance faded away into nothingness. Men forgot that being and significance are inextricably bound with human meanings and values. They did not realize that when they abandoned as untenable all their institutional forms of religion they still could have retained religiousness. As a consequence they failed to recognize the source of meanings and values. They vaguely thought of science as taking over all matters formerly associated with God, except the traditional superstitions; in truth, when they referred to ether as God they naively assumed that they were sacrificing nothing but actually making wondrous gains in their humanity. Eventually, however, the contemporary human situation became quite clear as eminent scientists began to explain that their enterprise is not absolute but is limited to the factual aspects of the world. The realization that science has neither the instrumentality nor the intent to probe for and examine human meanings and values compelled men to restudy their position. They had given up as wholly inadequate what they had construed as religion and had hopefully turned to science to define their humanity. Now they understood that though the findings of science could show the absurdity of many a pretension of sectarian faiths, the enterprise of science could never burst its bonds of objective factuality. One could thus gain a whole universe of facts, but no matter how he pieced them together they would not make a soul; indeed, they would not make even an organically unified universe. As men began to understand the situation, those of creative minds were filled with a sense of horror. They now knew that all the ferment of elemental and patterned stuff in the world is without purpose and without human significance, the individual man's life empty and meaningless in a space bubble dominated by senseless elemental stuff. In their eager search for being and humanity, men had given their full measure of devotion to science and had been rewarded with nothingness.

It is to O'Neill's credit that, though an American reared in a cultural atmosphere which had not attained the development of that in which his fellow artists in Europe were working, he nevertheless caught the sense of anguish in men's minds and tried to give it artistic expression. He saw that men had nothing to live for, that they were afraid to die, that in their misery they cruelly turned on their fellow men to make them suffer. O'Neill did not, however, adequately understand the anguish of his fellow men. The picture in his mind was a simple one of human irrationality. The Jews and the Romans in *Lazarus Laughed* could have had a good life, but they were filled with terror at the thought of death, and the terror destroyed the capacity for good will. Could they but have remembered what Lazarus taught them, they would have lived happily. In other words, life would be quite satisfactory if somehow men would

respond to explanations of life and death presumably derived from science. O'Neill thus stops short in his consideration of the problems of existence. He does not seem to know that he cannot solve the problems with a simple substitution of positive ways of life for negative. He does not understand that the latter are as necessary as the former, the one being unthinkable without the other.

Ironically enough O'Neill masks the very fact that his probings should have revealed, the finality of death. He fails to comprehend that the unique consciousness of a human being, that which puts the questions and seeks the answers, has no corresponding manifestation in the species. *Homo sapiens* as a class neither lives nor dies, for *Homo sapiens* is an anthropological fiction. In the continuum of occurrence there are only men, women, and children. They are the creatures that live and die, and they live and die as unique individuals. In *Lazarus Laughed* O'Neill attempts to thrust traditional religion away with one hand but to take back its essential character with the other. Men are to give up the idea of a personal immortality, the duration of the unique consciousness; they are to dissociate themselves from deities and souls in which they irrationally thought they participated. On the other hand, they are to rejoice in the assumed immortality of the human race, and a religion of Man is to take the place of a religion for men. Thus Lazarus cries out exultantly, "O men, fear not life! You die—but there is no death for Man!" But this is as irrational as the irrationality that O'Neill rejects, for it fails to recognize that the individual man's life and death are matters of supreme importance to him. One might as well expect men to shout hallelujah when they are dying because soon through their dead bodies much needed chemicals will be available to later generations. There is no sense in trying to hide the fact that men fear death because it means the end of the individual consciousness, the end of that which constitutes the man himself. Lacking evidence to the contrary, men of the twentieth century are persuaded that when a man is dead he is completely and forever dead.

The fate of Reuben in *Dynamo* might seem to suggest that O'Neill understands the insufficiency of all the views set forth in the play, those of Fife as well as those of the boy and his clergyman father. But we have no evidence actually to support such an opinion. If anything, we must assume that O'Neill leans strongly toward Fife, for there is more sympathy for the perspective of the practical engineer than for Reuben's mad worship of the dynamo, and none at all for the Reverend Light's faith. What troubles us is that O'Neill at no time gives a hint of the real difficulty. He fails to tell us directly or indirectly that science is a human enterprise that has no objects of worship, that facts cannot be ignored or dressed up to suit one's desires, that in the continuum of occurrence

neither the life nor the death of a man has any meaning or value. To be sure, had O'Neill been aware of this kind of perspective and developed it, he would have had insights for artistic creativity of a different order.

In our criticism of such works as *Lazarus Laughed* and *Dynamo* we are compelled to observe that artistic success is in certain respects a function of the cultural atmosphere. The artist can deploy only the materials that are culturally available to him. If they are abundant and rich, the opportunities for artistic creation are excellent; if they are scant and poor, the challenge will be too great except for men of the finest talents. During the last century and more, the artists of the west have been working in a world that has been growing factually richer at the same time that culturally it has been abandoning traditional meanings and values. And the products of our artists offer ample testimony regarding the nature of the circumstances in which they have found themselves. It would be interesting therefore to look at O'Neill in relation to Europeans who struggled with comparable raw materials, but such a study would be wholly beyond the limits of an essay. We may be able to give a hint of the possible findings by mentioning Edward FitzGerald with whom we are all familiar and Nikos Kazantzakis with whom we are becoming familiar.

The highly intelligent FitzGerald recognized the cultural situation and said all that he had to say in art with a few hundred lines of magnificent poetry. We must not allow ourselves to be blinded by the fact that he was making translations from verses composed by a twelfth century Persian poet, for the *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* as published in 1859 and in later versions is an English poem reflecting the European intellectual milieu of the nineteenth century. Seventy-nine years after the first edition of the *Rubaiyat*, the late Nikos Kazantzakis published *The Odyssey, A Modern Sequel*, a Greek poem of 33,333 lines. Both FitzGerald and Kazantzakis were fully aware of the deployable materials of the cultural atmosphere. The latter, however, had the advantage of doing his creative work when philosophers and artists were beginning to recover from the shock of living in a world which science reveals as meaningless and devoid of human values. As a result Kazantzakis could develop many phases of the human situation regardless of cosmic emptiness. In relation to the Englishman and the Greek, O'Neill was the youngest in years but the least developed in cultural insights. He could not grasp what FitzGerald had expressed a quarter of a century before O'Neill was born. Moreover, while Kazantzakis was in the midst of European developments in thought and practice, O'Neill stood on the periphery or was entirely outside. His own immediate environment could help him solely in the area of modern psychology. Thus while our greatest American dramatist was successful in exploiting some matters

of psychological import, he was unable to give artistic treatment to the ferment in religion, science, and existence. *Lazarus Laughed* and *Dynamo* are both witnesses to endeavors that failed.

CARL E. W. L. DAHLSTRÖM

O'NEILL: THE POWER OF DARING

THE PLACE was a wide, bare, dimly-lit rehearsal hall on the fifth floor of the old Theatre Guild building. The year was 1953. There was a platform, a small reading desk facing several rising rows of seats, and Lawrence Langner was speaking: "I can now see Gene entering through that door," he said, and pointed at a narrow lateral door, "walking shyly and sitting in the back of this hall as rehearsals were being started for. . . ."

And the illusion was so strong that my eyes veered to the door and for a moment I distinctly saw the young shy man walking in and sitting among us. But he had died a few days before, and he wasn't a young man then.

Lawrence Langner continued, and then Clifford Odets spoke, and an actress who had appeared in a play of his that had closed out of town. Those were his difficult years. In fact, when he died scant attention was paid in the papers. And even at this memorial meeting the attendance was rather poor in spite of the fact that it was meant exclusively for actors and other theater practitioners. The place was the Actors' Studio.

Odets read from an early diary to reveal how O'Neill had inspired him. He read for a long time entries that had absolutely nothing to do with O'Neill, although they must have had significance for Odets. I remember one: the Dempsey-Firpo fight. Finally, after pages and pages, O'Neill's name cropped up, a slight mention. Jimmy Light spoke too. He had been a good friend of O'Neill's from the old times, the beginnings with the Provincetown Players. . . .

They all told good things about him, unexpected things. Like the fact recalled by Langner that he was proud of his body and physical prowess, and claimed to swim better than his own son—I don't recall which one—even though he was over forty at the time and almost twice the boy's age.

And as the figure of O'Neill was being drawn by those who had known him well over the years or had worked in parallel paths through his triumph and his rather short eclipse, I kept wondering what had made possible this extraordinary career—extraordinary even then, although he was still to perform, from his grave, the unheard-of feat of fascinating us again, spellbinding us once more—on his terms.

Because this was certainly an American phenomenon, and yet one that goes against what some people consider the grain of materialistic, indifferent America. Who knows what is the true grain of America? Maybe he knew best of all. He certainly managed the impossible: being an

artist *and* making a million dollars, not really compromising and yet succeeding on this world's terms. At one time, we were told, he owned a house here, and another in France, and a third one, I don't remember where. And a fourth one too. He had a splendid study built in the manner of a ship's cabin. *And* the Nobel Prize. He really achieved the American dream: he had his cake, and ate it, too. "Don't sell your soul for nothing," advised the prostitute to Marco Millions after discovering one of his early poems. "That's bad business." O'Neill didn't sell it for nothing; he made it pay. He was both the Great God Brown *and* Dion Anthony.

There was only one flaw. Nature somehow compensates. It couldn't allow perhaps so much bounty. And so O'Neill died of a horrible disease, that martyred him to the end, and crippled all the parts of his body of which he was so proud, especially his hands, and he liked to write his plays in longhand.

O'Neill was made to pay in another sense, too. Life being what it is, this also might have been expected. It lavished its material rewards on one man who really didn't consider them the mark of his success, who didn't do it "just for money," as Parritt pretended to in order to justify his betrayal in *The Iceman Cometh*—others we know who would have been happy with this kind of success and curse the rest of the world, but not he—and withheld from him, at the end, when it mattered most, the one thing he needed above all others: the sense of his importance as a writer, the sense of his value as a man. Because to him the two things were one and the same. And to compound the irony, it lavished the old epithets and more, more praise than ever before, the very moment he died, practically. But he wasn't there to hear them.

Being a playwright was to O'Neill synonymous with being a man, because playwriting had made a man out of him. Clayton Hamilton, who used to meet him at the beach in New London, describes how O'Neill approached him, shyly again, and asked him to intercede with Professor Baker in order to get him into Baker's Harvard workshop, and to intercede with his own father so that he'd let him take the course.

James O'Neill had to be prodded because his disappointment wasn't limited to "Jamie" as we would gather from *Long Day's Journey Into Night*. "Eugene had always been a wayward boy," writes Hamilton, "and Mr. O'Neill was certain that he would never amount to anything. . . . Mr. O'Neill used to ask me, among other friends, what could possibly be done with this boy; and nobody was able to offer any answer."

At eighteen he had been "flunked out of Princeton at the end of the Freshman year for over-cutting," as O'Neill himself described it to Baker in his application letter. He wandered: Central America, Buenos Aires, South Africa. He might have turned out, like his brother, a

wastrel. But he wanted to write, and he wrote a trunkful; he wrote and wrote and wrote. Even when his plays weren't produced, or when they closed out of town, or when he felt they were not right for the times. Because knowing how plays do get produced, we may be certain that he could have had any of his plays produced at any time, had he wanted to. But he didn't. Not immediately in one case, not ever in others. Kafka, too, asked that his works be destroyed. Maybe they knew those whom they asked well enough to be certain their instructions would be disregarded. Maybe they were truly doubtful of their merit.

But this was certainly a caution unusual in O'Neill, because appearances notwithstanding, not all those who walk shyly are self-distrustful, and those who walk with bravura, self-confident. To go back to that memorial meeting for a moment, Odets, who walked energetically, and spoke of himself, and might have been taken for a conceited man, was racked with insecurity, while O'Neill, who walked shyly and talked very little, was full of the greatest conceit any American playwright, and few writers of any description, have ever had.

O'Neill had a conceit in the real sense of thinking highly of his own value, a conceit that breeds daring. Very few conceited men have this kind of conceit. Many of them are just trying to convince themselves, and usually can't. O'Neill had the conceit of thinking that whatever happened to him, that anything and everything that did happen to him, in fact, was important. That whatever he thought and felt was important. He took himself seriously; he didn't just say it; he meant it. He viewed himself in the light of history. He didn't want to be "a parlor entertainer" as he explained to George Jean Nathan, but "to do big work." And he thought that it was worth every effort and sacrifice—not only his own—to bring out what he had in him.

This enormous self-confidence was an affirmation against the demeaning attitude of his father, true. It was a prop. But it was more. In fact, his shyness was possibly just a way to conceal what he himself must have felt was an inordinately strong sense of superiority. His actions prove it. He published some of his very first plays—*Thirst and Other One-act Plays*—in 1914, before they were produced—at his father's expense, incidentally. No really shy apprentice playwright would do that. He was accepted in Baker's class in 1914–1915, but he stayed there only a short time, even though Baker wanted him, even though he had made an exception to let him in as a "special student." Baker was hurt, and O'Neill tried very hard to acknowledge a debt to him, and pretend that if he had failed to come for the second year it wasn't because he thought he had nothing to learn. But this must have been the reason. No, he wasn't shy.

O'Neill lived all his life with death in his body. Death was with him all the time, inside him. He feared it, in the end was "a little in love"

with it, as Edmund explains in *Long Day's Journey*. O'Neill had tuberculosis—six months in a hospital. Chekhov too—he even died of it. Chekhov reacted with a wan smile. But O'Neill reacted with violence. Chekhov was sweet. O'Neill suppressed the sweetness in him. Chekhov fought death by reflecting the world around him and, in so doing, the man whose eyes were gazing at it. O'Neill fought death by recording the world within him. They both built monuments to themselves. Both defeated, to the extent that any mortal can, death and oblivion.

O'Neill felt doomed; Chekhov was doomed. But Chekhov was hopeful for man. Chekhov was hopeful for the future. O'Neill wasn't. When his father quotes Shakespeare in *Long Day's Journey* to the effect that "we are such stuff as dreams are made on . . .," Edmund answers: "We are such stuff as manure is made on." O'Neill was born with what Unamuno called the tragic sense of life. Life is tragic. O'Neill had no illusions about happy endings because he knew that no ending is happy. He laughed, of course, at times. But the red apple had a core made of Koch bacilli.

When you are playing for such high stakes, when you are concerned with death, and oblivion, and faith in a godless universe, when you truly believe these are important questions, not just subjects for conversation at cocktail parties or dinners, when you are trying to achieve immortality, salvation in a way, for a creedless man, then you can dare to ignore many of the things that people in the theater consider of uppermost importance.

O'Neill didn't bend to the audience. In a way he despised the audience, along with the theater, but the way Duse did, in what they both had of the false and the untrue. But he respected the audience's judgment; he feared it, too, as all playwrights must. When *Dynamo* failed to please them he left unfinished the trilogy of which it was supposed to be a part. He didn't flatter the audience the way other writers do—flatter and titillate the audience. But he gave them the greatest possible compliment. He really opened himself to them. He let them see inside, cautiously, but honestly. And the audience instinctively felt it, the audience recognized it, and appreciated it. He used his personal life for his artistic life almost with the same ruthlessness as Strindberg, whom he admired. And only now, with the hindsight of his posthumous plays we realize how autobiographical some of his earlier plays were. *The Great God Brown* for instance.

With this hindsight we can understand better the great conflict of his life. With his mother, whom he loved, and hated (who will forget Parritt's final curse in *Iceman*: "You damned old bitch"? and we don't know the whole of that story, I am sure), and he hated himself for this hatred with a kind of remorse that only a Catholic can feel. And the conflict

with his father, whom he envied perhaps more than he deserved, and he loved, and he tried to *show* all his life. But he couldn't really, because the old man was cruel enough to leave him stranded, and died when Gene was rather young. He left him money but the most important account he left unsettled.

It is rather strange and moving to think of the old infirm man that Eugene had in due time become, his crippled hands barely able to help him, going to his room to face his father once more. He had his own children by then. He had hurt them at least as much and probably more than his own father had hurt him, but this was only lateral in his thinking. He was still the little Gene trying to wring out of his old man the one compliment he never could. And he didn't this time either, and couldn't lie about it in *Long Day's Journey*. All he heard was that half-hearted compliment: "Yes, there's the makings of a poet in you all right." "The *makings* of a poet," Edmund repeats "sardonically." But O'Neill wanted to be a real poet.

He had the *will* to be a poet, and who is to tell what is more important, the will or the talent? He struggled valiantly to be a real poet. And your father is supposed to think you are a real poet even if you aren't. These are the tender human lies that make parents and children help each other. Let the rest of the world judge him fairly. And indeed they judged him much more generously. It should have been the other way around, shouldn't it? "Impressed and at the same time revolted," read the father's stage directions at one point in *Long Day's Journey*. Gene wanted his father to be impressed but not revolted. He wanted his father to judge him with love, and doesn't the father who loves see as beautiful even an ugly son?

O'Neill's mixed feelings about his mother have left a blood trail through his plays. The son describes her in *A Moon for the Misbegotten* as "simple, and kind and pure of heart. She was beautiful." This is the way the author describes her in *Long Day's Journey*, and the way the father refers to her in that play: "One of the most beautiful girls you could ever see." But the older Tyrone also ridicules the idea that she could have become a nun, as she claimed: "She was a bit of a rogue, and a coquette." Maybe O'Neill hated precisely this in her. In *Misbegotten* the son blames himself for not having felt anything at his mother's death. "She'd understand and forgive me, don't you think?" he asks. And this inability to feel anyone's but his own suffering is confessed in the revealing speech of Edmund's in *Long Day's Journey*, where he sees himself as someone "who does not want and is not really wanted." He was wanted more than he knew or understood, but that's another matter. O'Neill's sincerity, his obvious honesty—which he searched for and mentions to Baker as a quality of the plays he is asking him to read—

shouldn't make us forget his astuteness, which is also apparent in those letters. *Long Day's Journey* is not as truly autobiographical as it purports to be, or rather it is but in a less direct way. The resemblances were too obvious and O'Neill couldn't quite tell the truth—openly, that is, because the truth is there, somewhat hidden. Edmund defends his mother as if to atone for his accusations and confessions in other plays. He even identifies with her. "I'm like Mama," he says to his father, "I can't help liking you in spite of everything." Edmund is too pat. O'Neill drew himself much more revealingly where he had a character to hide behind, like in *Desire Under the Elms* and *The Great God Brown*. Just as his father's true feeling of despair and disappointment about him, is channeled in that play in Jamie's direction, also his feelings about his mother are there romanticized. But after all, how honest can a son be about his parents? Where does artistic honesty end and filial loyalty begin?

O'Neill was a man in more senses than most other American playwrights, and he was also a child in more senses. There is the first page of the typescript of *Ah, Wilderness!* dedicated to the director Philip Moeller: "Again with all cheers—Pittsburgh and cuts notwithstanding!—and here's looking forward to the next one." His handwriting so careful—and so childish. Signed: "Gene," and to the left a detached, silly flourish. But maybe it takes a child to think it is possible to cheat death even on those terms, to struggle so hard for self-expression, even to the point of immolating your own offspring in the process. Because he remained self-centered as a child to the end. He, who had complained about his father's cruelty to him couldn't even fathom his own cruelty, more, total indifference, to his own children. (Incidentally, *Ah, Wilderness!* is called in the typescript—not in the published version—"A Play of Recollection." Then what contains the truth: *Long Day's Journey* or this play? Both probably, at various moments.)

O'Neill started his adventure in playwrighting with several assets over and above other aspiring playwrights. Although he donned a sailor's uniform and encouraged the myth to arise that he was an adventurer unrelated to the artificial life of the commercial theater, he was no seaman turned playwright. He was born into the theater. The fact that his father was a man of the theater—the theater as it was, not as it pretends to be—if not in New York then in the hinterland, meant that many of the things that most young playwrights must learn with labor and painful effort, were second nature to him. There is such a thing as a theatrical, dramatic approach, imposed not by phony limitations alone—those O'Neill rejected from the start—but by the real and concrete limitations of actors portraying a play on such a stage before such an audience. O'Neill didn't have to think consciously about those limitations; he

knew them in his bones. He didn't weaken every time a director or a producer told him that a work of his "wasn't really a play," and he was told that, too, because he knew as well as the most seasoned professional what a play was. In fact, he knew better.

That's why even though he broke almost all the so-called rules of the theater of his time—inspired to be true by Strindberg and others—he didn't do it as a reckless man. He plunged into space—but like an experienced aerialist. He didn't have just honesty; he also had a technique. He broke the time limit. Shaw also did it, but Shaw didn't get away with it while O'Neill did. He wrote *Strange Interlude* in nine acts, but provided a long enough intermission at the end of the fifth to transform it to all intents and purposes into two plays. He knew how to command the audience's attention and keep it. He knew the value of clarity and how to search for it; whether he achieved it or not in all cases is another matter. He knew, in one word, what are the requirements of the practical theater. He was a daring young man on a trapeze, but he knew how to fly.

The America in which he appeared was ready for him. American playwriting had not come of age. After the experience of the war the country was ready for something new, for a re-evaluation of life in different, more accurate terms. O'Neill began several years before but he exploded in the twenties. And the twenties were a period of madness, of taking-advantage-while-you-can-because-life-is-short-but-exciting. But the twenties were more. The twenties were the years of Dreiser and Lewis. The twenties, especially, were ready to listen—to quacks as well as to the real thing, but at first there seems to be little difference. Time would tell, just as it did, what was true and what was phony, and there was plenty of both then as there is now, and phoniness comes in many sizes and packages, some very enticing.

O'Neill was ready to fly and the Provincetown Players gave him the space. George Cram Kook and Susan Glaspell. Jig Kook, sad man dying alone in Greece after giving all to the playwriting of others and discovering the shortcomings of his own. He built a live, intense theater. Dreiser's *The Hand of the Potter* was done by them. Naturalistic, strong, cumbersome, foreshadowing even a good deal of the playwriting of the thirties. And others too. But only O'Neill was ready.

Bound East for Cardiff was the beginning, first at the Wharf Theatre in Provincetown, Mass., where even the sea cooperated—"there was a fog, just as the script demanded, fog bell in the harbor," wrote Susan Glaspell—and then again at the Playwrights Theatre on MacDougal Street in the Village, O'Neill speaking one line as the second mate. The Provincetown Players launched him, and although he had ostensibly turned his back on Broadway, he was well aware of its existence. In a

letter to Baker in 1919 he reveals his impatience at the delays in getting *Beyond the Horizon* produced—on Broadway. The truth of the matter is that few if any playwrights ever achieved such complete triumph in so short a time. The Pulitzer Prize with that very same *Beyond the Horizon*, his first full-length play, in 1920, and again in 1922 with *Anna Christie*. Immediately recognized in Europe as an important and authentic voice of America. Soon serious critics were writing on "Aeschylus and O'Neill."

Success fed his self-confidence, recognition whetted his appetite, and he wrote one play after another. He did them on Broadway and off. In fact, to use an agent's expression, he flooded the market. Plays about the sea, Negroes and whites, the search for youth, and God, love and betrayal, pipe dreams, marriage. He tried. He experimented. Faulkner said a writer must be measured against the ambition of his vision, how much he has tried to do, and with this yardstick O'Neill has no equals here, and few anywhere. Plays with masks, plays with split personalities, realism, expressionism, rough old-fashioned melodrama with Freudian intuitions. He dared more and more difficult feats. He dived from higher and higher platforms.

The amazing thing, at first glance, is that those plays found an audience at all. But he knew his audience. He knew the times. Maybe he didn't consciously know them. Maybe he was one with them. Those were the days of the six-day bicycle races, and the dancing marathons. Those were the days of the beginning awareness of the average audience with the discoveries of psychoanalysis. The audiences wanted to plunge into the subconscious, into repressed desires and unconfessed motives, and they welcomed the opportunity to do it with O'Neill.

But it was a dangerous enterprise none the less. And he wasn't afraid to try. He wasn't afraid that if he tried and failed he would lose his hold on the public. The audience, under the careful guidance of George Jean Nathan, understood him, followed him and respected him. He was for a long time the pampered child of America. They goaded him to more and more risky exploits. And he attempted everything. Even comedy. Not just folksy comedy, although he could as *Ah, Wilderness!* proves, but satiric comedy as well: *Marco Millions*.

His dialogue, which had started as a reflection of the idiom he had heard around him—he went back to it in *Iceman* and *Hughie*—became more and more introverted. He stopped listening to any but his inner voice. In order to express an emotion he often used words that were too pedestrian for their purpose, but even this the audience and the critics accepted and forgave, because if the choice of words could have perhaps been more fortunate and less direct, the emotion itself was true.

But a day came when this pampered prodigious child would suffer his

first serious accident. The trapeze is a dangerous, unsteady affair at best. Other playwrights have had such accidents earlier in their careers. O'Neill had been lucky. He had been spared. He had touched the inner fiber of the critics so that attacks were never devastating. But the times had changed. And after the war, right after the second war, when those who had fought were coming back with blood in their eyes, and those who had stayed behind were receiving them with a weight on their consciences, and both had or needed to have their illusions at their highest, then O'Neill appeared with his pessimistic masterpiece, *The Iceman Cometh*. I saw it in Chicago then, in its original production, and didn't know what to make of it. I saw it again in New York at the Circle in the Square, and I considered it the greatest play O'Neill ever wrote. But the second time it came around O'Neill was already dead. And the first exposure had been dismal.

He had fallen but he wouldn't let that daunt him. He kept working alone, dropping all pretenses, in order to get to the heart of that terrible conflict he had not resolved even that late in his life.

But *A Moon for the Misbegotten* folded, out of town, and O'Neill became more cautious. *Misbegotten* was published in 1952, but other plays he had completed remained in his desk. The loving dedication to Carlotta for *Long Day's Journey* is dated 1941, and *A Touch of the Poet* was first copyrighted in 1946. He continued writing but he wasn't flying any more. The acrobat was old and had to take a rest.

But a renewal of interest was certainly quick in coming. The late fifties were perhaps a bit like the twenties, in their excitement if not in other respects. The general disappointment after the great illusions of the post-war era coincided with O'Neill's mood and the time came for an O'Neill revival.

As he died, O'Neill might be said to have been entering a whole new and fruitful period of his life. He would have had the encouragement needed to proceed had he been present to receive the accolades of the last few years. This most American of all our playwrights is also the most European. It has been remarked that ours is a country of beginnings, of first acts, and certainly few playwrights continue to grow after their first successes, after their forties. But Shaw wrote *Saint Joan* when he was sixty-seven, and O'Neill was also made of very resilient stuff. But he died at sixty-five.

His last plays are clean and simple. Audiences will always like plots, and writers will always complain about the stresses that those plots create. Ibsen's last plays have little plot, little movement. O'Neill tried to discard the old strait jackets, to concentrate on the very essence of the problems that commanded his interest. He even stopped going to the theater. He had never been a great theater-goer. He believed he could

imagine a perfect performance in his head, and a faulty performance would stand in his way. It is as if in the end he had decided to abandon all the crutches, all theatrical props, and trust that a plain and honest presentation would hold an audience without outside help. It is certainly easy to see that had he wanted to, he certainly could have broken up scenes, built his plays differently. He knew how to do it. His craftsmanship was extremely accomplished almost from the very beginning, and he had certainly sharpened it against the grindstone of many difficult plays through the years.

No, it wasn't inability, it was conscious choice, the choice to abandon all the tricks of the trade, so to speak—or most of them anyway, not the ones demanded by the very nature of the play form as he understood it—and present to us a limpid example of his vision as a man, as a man who had suffered and made others suffer and yet preserved the poet in himself to the end. He had criticized the world of compromise in *Marco Millions*, where the poet rejects his better, earlier self, even forgets it. O'Neill managed to keep this spark to the end, and this is no mean achievement. It is as if in order to prove his mettle the acrobat had decided to leap once more, but without help of any kind, without even a trapeze, just to show his courage and the gracefulness of his form. O'Neill took from many sources, from the immortal to the already forgotten, but he never imitated himself, thinking that he had found a style that was safe. Being safe wasn't his goal in any sense. Expressing his inner vision was, and he had one.

O'Neill has been criticized as a weak thinker. It has been fashionable to dismiss him as a thinker in order to praise him as a dramatist. O'Neill certainly thought many things, and changed his thoughts many times, and the evolution of his thoughts, which certainly should be studied carefully, has left a clear path in his writing. Also in this respect he dared to be himself, to think for himself. To take one example: Regardless of whether we agree or disagree on what he says, in fact regardless of whether we can agree on the real meaning of it, *Iceman* is the most powerful theorem any playwright has ever put on paper. And it works as drama too. With its repetitions—which are necessary for the cumulative effect—it starts with a premise and patiently carries it to its devastating logical conclusion. O'Neill was not an intuitive writer. He didn't start from the inside hoping for the best—and I don't claim that this is necessarily wrong. Although he seemed to be a realist going to life first, and then putting his discoveries on paper, in truth he was a romantic, starting with an idea and clothing it in dramatic terms.

A Touch of the Poet is in the same manner a theorem demonstrated. In fact, until the pattern becomes evident, it is easy to dismiss it as much less than what it is. Here his alienation becomes evident too. Because

O'Neill, the son of a once-poor Irishman with no standing in conventional society, because of his acting career, never felt quite at home. "I will always be a stranger who never feels at home . . . who can never belong," Edmund says in *Long Day's Journey*. And in this sense he is also very American, very typical, because we all feel here alienated somehow and in some respect: either because we belong to a recent immigration wave, or to a minority religious sect, or we live in an area where we are the few, or we have gone to the wrong college or prep school, or no prep school, or because we are Southerners in the North or Yankees in the South, or for any of another million reasons.

O'Neill's is a philosophy of despair, but it is so thoroughly negated by his own life that it becomes only the despair of a sensitive man looking at the folly of his contemporaries. A despair as total as O'Neill's could only lead to a total stupor. Those who fall under such weight don't take the trouble to state their case so strongly, with so many works, with so many positive acts. Just as we will find some of the greatest idealists hiding under a veneer of cynicism, and some true cynics parading as idealists, O'Neill's pessimism and despair reveal by the very nature of his life the most positive attitude. And in this too he resembles Strindberg.

O'Neill's trajectory presents the only accomplished life of any playwright in our country. The most American of our playwrights, and the most universal. The most daring, the most finished performance in this country of first acts. His drama had a beginning, a middle and an end. And an unusual epilogue, which may still be unfolding, and I hope it does.

NORMAN C. CHAITIN

THE PSYCHOANALYZING OF EUGENE O'NEILL

1

IT TOOK THE CRITICS a long time to make up their minds about Eugene O'Neill—perhaps because it took him so long to make up his mind about himself. The fact that even by the year of his death it was impossible to pick any single play of his and assert that it was a "typical" play may help to explain the uncertainty. For if one were to say that *The Hairy Ape* is a typical O'Neill play, there would be *Beyond the Horizon* to contradict him; if one were to choose *Strange Interlude*, *Ah, Wilderness!* would refute him; if *The Great God Brown*, then where would *Marco Millions* fit into the picture?

It was only after some years that the outlines of any pattern began to emerge. They were quite vague at first. Critics began to suspect that O'Neill was on a quest or search of some sort—not a very original sort of goal for a literary man, after all. They talked of values and illusions, of romance versus realism, of man's body and man's spirit, of poetry and the soul, of love versus hate, faith versus skepticism, life versus death. Slowly, however, certain names and certain terms began to creep into the reviews and books about the plays and their author. Some critics quickly denied their application and validity; others accepted their presence, but scorned their results; but eventually the following critical generation seized on them and made them the core of their analysis and evaluation. The situation was considerably confused by the fact that the playwright himself took the lead in rejecting the implications of this attitude and insisted on his personal and purely individual approach to the problems with which he faced his characters—usually with tragic, or at least disastrous, results.

The question which inexorably pushed its way from the wings into the forestage of O'Neill criticism was this: To what extent was Eugene O'Neill to be regarded as a student and practitioner of the "new psychology," as it was at first denominated? Was his interpretation of the motives and actions of most of his *dramatis personae* to be traced to the new "science" of psychoanalysis, with Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung as its high priests, and perhaps Friedrich Nietzsche, Arthur Schopenhauer, Henrik Ibsen, and August Strindberg as its John the Baptists, or did his understanding of his characters come basically from his own mind and soul, as he stoutly and consistently maintained? The problem was—and still is—a nice one.

But perhaps some of the tangled skein can be partially unraveled.

The first clear and traceable stirrings of a usually worried or hostile speculation about these psychoanalytical roots did not reach the surface until many years after O'Neill's short plays had appeared at Provincetown or in Greenwich Village and several years after the first of his long ones had risen to Broadway. The initial use of the actual term "psychoanalysis" as applied to O'Neill, however, was apparently made by the reviewer of *Gold* in the *New York Evening Post* for June 2, 1921, when he remarked scathingly that the play was trite and incredible through its author's endeavors "to blend the realistic, psycho-analytic and purely sensational." No other early critic of the play adopted this approach, and the term remained neglected for several years. One of the first to resuscitate it and develop it at some length was T. H. Dickinson, who in 1925 wrote in his *Playwrights of the New American Theatre*:

Given O'Neill's nature and interests he could not have lived through the second decade of the twentieth century without coming under the influence of psychoanalysis. His relation with this subject is typical of that of the better class of writers of our time. He appreciated the value of the new theory to the understanding of the mind of man. He was alive to the contributions it could make to the subject matter of plays. But the implications of the science itself were too widespread to be readily incorporated in the substance or technique of the plays. . . . His attempts to apply the scientific method to the underlying situations of his plays have been unsatisfactory. . . .¹

Dickinson's refusal to consider O'Neill's "few plays under this influence" as "representative of his art at its best" was characteristic of the early writers on O'Neill, but this critic was at least perspicacious enough to recognize the significance of its presence. Others acknowledged this presence only indirectly. "R.J." in *The Spectator* No. 5007 in 1925 wrote about O'Neill as the "Dramatist of Monomania." When the visiting English novelist-playwright-critic, St. John Ervine, attacked the "pessimistic brutality" and "lack of spiritual insight" in O'Neill's plays (as he attacked most of the American plays he was seeing), Frank R. Reed in the *Theatre Magazine* for October, 1926, introduced into his defense of O'Neill a direct reference to the use of the Oedipus complex in *Desire Under the Elms*. Later in the same year Barrett H. Clark, the earliest of O'Neill's biographers, in the first version of his series of biographies, referred to O'Neill's use of sex-suppression in *Diff'rent* and stated that Eben and Abbie in *Desire Under the Elms* were the "victims of Puritanical repressions, of unrepressed passion, and of the mighty current of life."² Lewis Mumford in the *New York Herald Tribune Books* for November 20, 1927, also remarked that this play afforded one of

1. Dickinson, "The Playwright Unbound: Eugene O'Neill," *Playwrights of the New American Theatre* (New York, 1925), pp. 88-89.

2. Clark, *Eugene O'Neill* (New York, 1926), pp. 67, 90.

O'Neill's many pictures of psychic disintegration caused by an obsession.

The performance of *The Great God Brown* in 1926 and *Strange Interlude* in 1928 made it impossible for the critics to close their eyes and shut their mouths any longer as to what O'Neill was working with. Gilbert W. Gabriel in the *New York Sun* for January 25, 1926, complained that by using psychoanalysis in *Brown* O'Neill had made the "macabre" story "poesque in its impossibility . . .," and John Anderson in the *New York Evening Post* of the same date commented that the mask was used to imply a dual personality and was a step beyond the use of two separate characters to indicate the split personality of Ponce de León in *The Fountain*.

Strange Interlude, however, broke the riddle wide open. While the board of the Theatre Guild was still debating in 1927 whether to undertake such an unheard of play, Lawrence Langner recommended it as "the next step forward in playwriting: the poetry of the unconscious to offset the stark realism of the conscious. . . ."³ On February 5, 1928, the morning after the premiere, J. Brooks Atkinson of the *New York Times* exclaimed that "nine acts of psychopathic fury may weary, but when Mr. O'Neill is the black magician they do not bore. . . ." Simultaneously Gabriel in the *Sun* brought the name of the bogey man out into the open when he maintained that this was the first play to "truly cope with Freud" (perhaps the first introduction of this fearsome name into the controversy) and pointed out that the soliloquies and the asides were simply symbols of the unconscious. At the same moment and for the same occasion Gilbert Seldes was setting his readers in the *Dial* right concerning the erroneous judgment of Gabriel in the matter of the asides: "And Mr. Gilbert Gabriel, unhappily forgetting what the psychoanalysts have been able to do with the Oedipus plays, hailed its innovations as a technique at last competent to cope with Freud."

Fourteen months later in *Vanity Fair*, in recalling the earlier *Brown*, Gabriel concluded that the asides went beyond the masks in their revelations of the workings of the unconscious mind. Joseph Wood Krutch in the *Nation* for February 15, 1928, and John Mason Brown, in *Theatre Arts Monthly* for April, 1928, while agreeing on O'Neill's basic approach in *Strange Interlude*, reached opposite conclusions about his results. Krutch wrote that O'Neill's use of introspection and the unconscious mind had helped him to achieve "a modern literary masterpiece." Brown, however, lamented:

Mr. O'Neill has had recourse to such hoary devices as the aside and the soliloquy. Taking the funeral baked meats of nineteenth century technique which realism discarded for a more meticulous and veracious craftsmanship, he has coldly furnished forth the

3. Walter Prichard Eaton, *The Theatre Guild: The First Ten Years* (New York, 1929), pp. 103-4.

marriage table of the pioneering experiment in bringing Freud and modern psychology to the stage. . . . It is a pity, too, that Mr. O'Neill, who is primarily a dramatist of the emotions, should be taking himself more and more seriously of present years as a mystic seer, who in the case of *Strange Interlude* seems to be writing with a crystal in one hand and a volume of Freud in the other.

After several more months to reflect, Archibald Henderson in the *Virginia Quarterly Review* for January, 1929, told how "a continuous flow of subconscious life is phrased in words. The stream of consciousness flows on unimpeded by the inhibitions of convention and the restrictions of alien presence"; Harry McGuire in the *Drama* for March, 1929, wrote about introversion and compulsion; and Eaton described the technique of the play as "a new dramatic form to express the newer psychology."

Barrett Clark had all along been chary about using the terminology of the "newer psychology." In 1930, however, in a revised edition of his book, he quoted two of O'Neill's own statements to him on his loving familiarity with Greek tragedy, Elizabethan tragedy, Ibsen, and Strindberg, and in a comment on the vocal expression of thoughts in *Strange Interlude* he used the phrase "subconscious mind."⁴ In neither of his books so far had he referred to "psychoanalysis."

In the previous year, however, Joseph T. Shipley, in a University of Washington "Chapbook" entitled *The Art of Eugene O'Neill*, had said of the man whom he called "unquestionably the first great American playwright":

Present though he may the confused personalities of our time, viewed through the intricate web psychanalysis [*sic*] weaves, the playwright is steadiest and surest when he leads them the stark simple ways of our Saxon forebears, when they draw their power and their substance out of the sea and the soil. . . .

Again, in a skeptical discussion of the value and the effectiveness of the soliloquies and asides in *Strange Interlude*, Shipley wrote: "In the asides, each character must psychanalyze itself, or present no more than such thoughts as are commonly withheld from speech; these—in life and good drama—are readily inferred from the situation, betraying words, and action. . . ."

Even in the 1930's, critics with some authority persisted in shutting their eyes as far as possible to the existence of this obnoxious material in O'Neill's plays. In 1934 Virgil Geddes, in a booklet published by the Brookfield Players of Brookfield, Connecticut, under the revolting title of *The Melodramadness of Eugene O'Neill*, dealt contemptuously with *Strange Interlude* as a play in which its author "romanticizes with desire," but found the long run of the play "not surprising," because

4. Clark, *Eugene O'Neill: The Man and His Plays* (New York, 1929), pp. 35, 146, 177.

In addition to the novelties in length and treatment, there is much popular philosophy in the play and the philosophy is interpreted not beyond but in accordance with the psychology teachers of our time. It is a sort of passionate rendering of the "newer" methods of character analysis popularized by Freud and set going by O'Neill against the background of Puritan behavior.

And in the next year even Richard Dana Skinner, one of O'Neill's admirers as well as the author of *Our Changing Theatre* and the play reviewer for the *Commonweal*, in only two short passages indicated any knowledge of or interest in psychoanalysis in his pursuit of his theme of O'Neill as an individualistic, romantic poet in quest of an understanding of the conflict between good and evil:

In spite of such tawdry phrases as "Oedipus complex," drawn from a nebulous jargon of certain early schools of psychiatry, and implying an acutely personal problem of neurotic individuals, the incest problem as we find it in the great tragedies and the enduring myths seems to symbolize very clearly a critical stage in the break between childhood and manhood.

Later Skinner referred to Sam Evans as "this amiable surface extravert—the overcompensation from [Nina's] fear of the depths represented by the dead Gordon. . . ."⁵ In thus betraying his own acquaintance with the "jargon" which he generally rejected in explaining his rather narrow and conventional interpretation of O'Neill, Skinner emphasized his own antipathy to the "new psychology" of Freud and his school.

2

When Edwin A. Engel published his book, *The Haunted Heroes of Eugene O'Neill*, in 1953, he prefaced it with the remark that "close to twenty years have passed since a new full-length study of O'Neill has been published in America"—a covert allusion to Skinner's book.⁶ In that interim a vast change had occurred in the approach to O'Neill through psychoanalytical channels, noted frequently and commented on freely by Engel but developed to their full potentialities by Doris V. Falk in her *Eugene O'Neill and the Tragic Tension* in 1958. Both these writers, however, had been to some extent anticipated many years before by a study which probably neither of them knew, since it was an unpublished M.A. thesis on "The Influence of Psychoanalytical Material on the Plays of Eugene O'Neill," by Martha Carolyn Sparrow.⁷

5. Skinner, *Eugene O'Neill: A Poet's Quest* (New York, 1935), pp. 143, 195.

6. Engel, *The Haunted Heroes of Eugene O'Neill* (Cambridge, Mass., 1953), p. vii.

7. This thesis was written at Northwestern University in 1930 under my direction. Except for an allusion in *The Saturday Review of Literature* on May 28, 1932, the thesis has probably remained unknown to all but the dozen or so people from all over the country who, according to the loan record, have borrowed it on interlibrary loans. I am indebted to this thesis for a good many of the facts and ideas used in this article. I am also much indebted to an unpublished Ph.D. thesis written at Northwestern University in 1948, Geneva Herndon's "American Criticism of Eugene O'Neill: 1917-1948," in which exact references for many of the following journalistic and book criticisms may be found.

In the process of composing her thesis, in 1929 Miss Sparrow wrote to Barrett Clark to ask whether he could throw any private light on her subject. Mr. Clark, helpful as always, replied as follows:

I wish I could tell you definitely just what you want to know about O'Neill's conscious use of Freudian material, but I honestly confess I cannot. Doubtless you will find in the reading list to my new O'Neill book . . . some references that will help you. . . . I know O'Neill has done some reading in the subject but it is my private opinion that he has not gone out of his way to make special and direct use of what he has read. I should say that most of his plays were based more on personal observation and knowledge than on reading or hearsay.

This judgment would accord quite well with what Clark wrote in the 1933 edition of his biography, which included a statement from O'Neill himself on the matter—perhaps prompted by Miss Sparrow's inquiry. In commenting on the third section of *Mourning Becomes Electra*—that is, *The Haunted*—Clark stated that the play was

largely concerned with the exposition of the introspective tragedies of a man and a woman observed and studied to a certain extent in the light of modern science. That the revelations of this science were expressed and patterned somewhat too precisely after Freud and Jung I felt on first reading the play, but O'Neill's answer to my criticism is worth quoting:

I don't agree with your Freudian objection. Taken from my author's angle, I find fault with critics on exactly the same point—that they read too damn much Freud into stuff that could very well have been written exactly as is before psychoanalysis was ever heard of. Imagine the Freudian bias that would be read into Stendhal, Balzac, Strindberg, Dostoevsky, etc., if they were writing today! . . . In short, I think I know enough about men and women to have written *Mourning Becomes Electra* almost exactly as it is if I had never heard of Freud or Jung or the others. Authors were psychologists, you know, before psychology was invented. And I am no deep student of psychoanalysis. As far as I can remember, of all the books written by Freud, Jung, etc., I have read only four, and Jung is the only one of the lot who interests me. Some of his suggestions I find extraordinarily illuminating in the light of my own experience with hidden motives.⁸

This statement by O'Neill becomes still more striking and significant when taken in conjunction with a much more concrete and revealing letter written by O'Neill himself from Saint-Antoine du Rocher, France, on October 13, 1929, to Miss Sparrow in response to her reiterated request for his personal aid in giving a sound foundation to her thesis:⁹

8. Clark, Eugene O'Neill: *The Man and His Plays* (New York, 1947), pp. 135-36.

9. This letter, with some accompanying comments by me, was printed in the *S.R.L.* on May 28, 1932—and again four weeks later!

There is no conscious use of psychoanalytical material in any of my plays. All of them could easily be written by a dramatist who had never heard of the Freudian theory and was simply guided by an intuitive psychological insight into human beings and their life-impulsions that is as old as Greek drama. It is true that I am enough of a student of modern psychology to be fairly familiar with the Freudian implications inherent in the actions of some of my characters while I was portraying them; but this was always an after-thought and never consciously was I for a moment influenced to shape my material along the lines of any psychological theory. It was my dramatic instinct and my personal experience with human life that alone guided me.

I most certainly *did not* get my ideas of Nina's compulsion from a dream mentioned by Freud in "A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis." I have only read two books of Freud's, "Totem and Taboo" and "Beyond the Pleasure Principle." The book that interested me the most of all those of the Freudian school is Jung's "Psychology of the Unconscious" which I read many years ago. If I have been influenced unconsciously it must have been by this book more than any other psychological work. But the "unconscious" influence stuff strikes me as always extremely suspicious! It is so darned easy to prove! I would say that what has influenced my plays the most is my knowledge of the drama of all time—particularly Greek tragedy—and not any books on psychology.

I am familiar with Behavioristic theory, too, and if one were to go digging for it in my plays, I'm sure a lot of conclusive examples of its influence could be detected—particularly, I imagine, from those plays that were written before I'd ever heard of Behaviorism! I was writing plays a long time before I knew anything of psychoanalysis! In your last letter I believe you spoke of "The Emperor Jones." That certainly was!

These confessions by O'Neill naturally provoke several questions and comments. Why was he so skeptical about admitting the "'unconscious' influence stuff" as affecting his own plays while simultaneously admitting that it was Jung's *Psychology of the Unconscious* that had interested him most "of all those of the Freudian school"? Notice, too, that O'Neill himself was the first to introduce the name of Jung into the argument: no one before, so far as I have discovered, had cited it. As for the attempt to intrude a red herring in the naming of Behaviorism, the rival school of the "new psychology" which John B. Watson had offered the public of the day with some success, Miss Sparrow was—rightly—unable to unearth any traces of it in her investigation. A comparison of O'Neill's two letters, to Miss Sparrow and Mr. Clark, also reveals that, although the first implies that he had read fairly widely in the new psychological literature not by Freud (in the allusion to the "book that interested me the most of all those of the Freudian school"), the second limits the field to "only four" of "all the books written by Freud, Jung, etc." Although he had cited three concrete titles to Miss

Sparrow, the unnamed fourth—evidently not by Freud himself—may never be identified. It was probably by Jung or Adler; but the “etc.” is mysterious.¹⁰

O'Neill in his letter to Miss Sparrow also asserted: “I was writing plays a long time before I knew anything of psychoanalysis! In your last letter [which he had not answered!] I believe you spoke of ‘The Emperor Jones.’ That certainly was!” O'Neill read the manuscript of *Jones* to Susan Glaspell and her husband, George Cram Cook, in the early fall of 1920.¹¹ Thus the problem is raised as to just when O'Neill became aware of the “new psychology” and began to examine it. It is, of course, quite possible that at first he simply absorbed a general consciousness of its existence from the “air” around him, since this was the sort of topic which would arouse the attention of the “advanced” groups among which he was moving. In 1915, the year before he went to Provincetown, *Suppressed Desires* by Susan Glaspell and “Jig” Cook had been produced at its Wharf Theatre, and O'Neill must soon have become acquainted with its spoofing of the new cult.¹² It is noteworthy that even the other little theaters of the time had rejected the play because it was regarded as “too special.”¹³ But the first appearance of any unmistakable allusion to the subject in any of O'Neill's extant works did not occur until *Beyond the Horizon*, which was produced in February, 1920, and printed in the same year. As Agnes Boulton tells the story in her unfinished biography, *Part of a Long Story*, O'Neill had, however, practically completed the play by the time of his marriage to her (on April 12, 1918; Miss Boulton for some peculiar reason carefully abstains from giving a single definite date anywhere in her fascinating but probably somewhat romanticized book).¹⁴ As Miss Sparrow detected when she studied the texts of the printed versions of this play, toward the end of the first scene in the 1920 edition Robert Mayo, in telling Ruth about his boyhood dreams of what was “beyond the horizon” and of his juvenile belief in fairies, dropped the casual remark: “I suppose the mental science folks would call it self-hypnosis.” But when the second edition of the play came out in 1924 this remark was eliminated. A similar omission, which Miss Sparrow did not note, had taken place even earlier in the same scene when Robert had used the phrase “a fixed idea” in telling his brother Andrew: “You're suffering from a fixed idea about my delicateness—and so are Pa and Ma.”¹⁵

10. Perhaps it might have been Barbara Low's *Psych-Analysis, A Brief Account of the Freudian Theory*, with an introduction by Ernest Jones (New York, 1920), or H. A. Frink's *Morbid Fears and Compulsions. Their Psychological and Psychoanalytical Treatment* (London, 1921).

11. Crosswell Bowen (“with the assistance of Shane O'Neill”), *The Curse of the Mibegotten: A Tale of the House of O'Neill* (New York, 1959), p. 131.

12. Bowen, p. 78, calls *Suppressed Desires* “a satire on Freud, whose writings were then beginning to sweep the country.”

13. Engel, p. 5.

14. Boulton, *Part of a Long Story* (New York, 1958), pp. 101, 111, 175.

15. referred to *The Emperor Jones* rather than *Beyond the Horizon* in this connection.

15. *Beyond the Horizon* (New York, 1920), pp. 21, 11. In my note to the S.R.L. I carelessly

Perhaps too much significance should not be attached to these eliminations, since O'Neill, on the advice of his producers and critics, had revised and shortened his whole play, but nevertheless the suppression might indicate the dramatist's "unconscious" reluctance to associate himself directly with psychoanalysis at the later period when it was being talked about so widely. Consequently, the first surviving reference to any specific psychoanalytical association in the standard editions of O'Neill does not occur until 1925 in Dion's opening soliloquy in the first main scene of *The Great God Brown* as he picks up his New Testament (after the prologue):

"Come unto me all ye who are heavy laden and I will give you rest."
 . . . I will come—but where are you, Savior? . . . Blah! Fixation on
 old Mamma Christianity. . . .

In further corroboration of O'Neill's open knowledge of psychoanalytical terminology by this time there is his letter about his intentions in his play, sent to the *New York Evening Post* on February 13, 1926, and reading in part:

Dion Anthony—Dionysus and St. Anthony—the creative pagan acceptance of life, fighting eternal war with the masochistic, life-denying spirit of Christianity as represented by St. Anthony. . . .

In the play the Oedipus complex, stemming from a mother-fixation, also seems to be at the base of Dion's relations with both Margaret and Cybel; but the phrase is never used.

By *Strange Interlude* in 1928, however, O'Neill had done with subterfuge. The famous mental comment of dear old Charley Marsden as he first meets Dr. Edmund Darrell in the second act at once comes to mind:

Giving me the fishy, diagnosing eye they practice at medical school . . . like freshmen from Ioway cultivating broad A's at Harvard! . . . what is his specialty? . . . neurologist, I think . . . I hope not psychoanalyst . . . a lot to account for, Herr Freud! . . . punishment to fit his crimes, be forced to listen eternally during breakfast while innumerable plain ones tell him dreams about snakes . . . pah, what an easy cure-all! . . . sex the philosopher's stone . . . "O Oedipus, O my king! The world is adopting you!" . . .

This is not the place to try to decide whether this commentary on Freud represents O'Neill's own opinion, or only poor Charley Marsden's, though most critics think it represents both. On the other hand, Marsden's own Oedipus complex, Nina's compulsion neurosis, Gordon's fixation of his affections on Sam, his turning away from his mother and his instinctive hatred of his real father, Darrell's ironical Freudian "slip of the tongue" during the boat race, and the general introspection of all the characters make the conclusion unavoidable that O'Neill—consciously or unconsciously—has taken Herr Freud to himself.

The story of O'Neill's love-hate flirtations with Freud would of course be much more clean-cut if there were only some external corroborative evidence of when they began. The "many years ago" of his letter to Miss Sparrow in 1929, though very vague, is the closest statement we have with the exception of his reference to *The Emperor Jones*. If only Agnes Boulton had been more observant during her early years with him from 1917 to 1919, some significant hint might have been preserved. But although she remarks over and over that he was always reading, to judge from her reports this reading consisted of nothing but poetry (poets unspecified), Nietzsche, Ibsen, especially Strindberg—and the *Saturday Evening Post*. O'Neill's letter to Clark also added Stendhal, Balzac, and Dostoevsky. Clark's 1929 biography had already named Jack London, Joseph Conrad, and Rudyard Kipling among O'Neill's early favorites, with Marx, Kropotkin, and Nietzsche coming later. O'Neill read Nietzsche in translation before he went to Harvard in 1914, but told Clark that he also read *Also Sprach Zarathustra* there in the original, with the help of a grammar and dictionary, because he wanted to get enough control of German to read Wedekind, none of whose plays were yet available in English. In disavowing any influence of German expressionism on him, he admitted that he had seen Kaiser's *From Morn to Midnight* in New York in 1922, but did not think very well of it. Clark believes that he might have also read Hasenclever. Other playwrights mentioned by O'Neill included Schnitzler, Pinero, Henry Arthur Jones, and Lessing, as well as the Greeks and the Elizabethans in general. In his early Greenwich Village journalism days he wrote parodies on *Hiawatha*, Walt Mason, Robert Burns, Robert W. Service, and Villon. John V. A. Weaver once read a lot of *The Spoon River Anthology* aloud to him.¹⁶ In *Ah, Wilderness!* young Richard Miller has been reading Swinburne, Wilde, and *The Rubaiyat*. Nowhere, however, do the names of Freud, Jung, Adler, Brill, Ernest Jones, etc., appear. Brill says that psychoanalysis was unknown in the United States until he introduced it in 1908.¹⁷ *Totem and Taboo* was written in 1912-13 and translated in 1919. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* was published in Vienna in 1920 and translated in London in 1922. Jung's *Psychology of the Unconscious* was published in Zurich in 1912 and translated in New York by Dr. Beatrice M. Hinkel in 1917. It is dubious whether O'Neill's shaky knowledge of German would have emboldened him to tackle these formidable works in the original. If he did not, then he must have read them in English in the late teens and early twenties, and any earlier knowledge of psychoanalysis must have come from hearsay or popular magazine articles about them—though books on the subject in English had been coming out since about 1914.

16. Clark, *Eugene O'Neill* (1929), pp. 18, 34, 35, 37, 62, 93, 96, 113, 122, 124-26.

17. A. A. Brill, "Introduction" to *The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud* (New York, 1938), p. 3. The real interest in the subject, however, began in 1909 when Freud and Jung, on the invitation of Dr. G. Stanley Hall, delivered a series of lectures at Clark University.

At any rate, Miss Sparrow's examination of the external and internal evidence convinced her that in the following plays O'Neill's use of psychoanalytical material was conscious: *Beyond the Horizon*, *The Emperor Jones*, *Diffrent*, *Desire Under the Elms*, *The Great God Brown*, *Lazarus Laughed*, *Strange Interlude*, and *Dynamo*. In the following plays she concluded that he seemed to have been "writing from life": *All God's Chillun Got Wings*, *Welded*, *The Fountain*, *Anna Christie*, *The First Man*, *Gold*, *The Hairy Ape*, and *Marco Millions*.

3

From the late 1920's onward the critics, in newspapers, magazines, and books, showed a constantly accelerating tendency to look at O'Neill's plays in the light of some aspect of psychoanalysis. In May, 1925, Grenville Vernon in the *Theatre Magazine* spoke of *The Emperor Jones* as an example of O'Neill's supremacy in writing of primitive humanity. Ten years later Eleanor Flexner, in "The Quest of Eugene O'Neill" in the *New Theatre* magazine for September, 1935, diagnosed that Jones was defeated "by his own past, racial as well as individual." In 1939 Anita Block's *The Changing World in Plays and Theatre* made Jones into a symbol of the Negro race and talked of "the race-memories of one of its individuals" and of letting "a character reveal his unconscious self." In 1941 Oscar Cargill in *Intellectual America* remarked that "primitivism scored its first great victory with the early plays of Eugene O'Neill," and in 1945 John Gassner, in *Masters of the Drama*, commented on the "psychological study inherent in the account of Emperor Jones' atavistic fears." But none of these critics was yet ready to discuss the play as an illustration of Jung's "collective unconscious" or "racial memory."

Diffrent continued to be regarded by many critics, as it was by Miss Sparrow, as the first of O'Neill's plays to give clear testimony to O'Neill's interest in the "new psychology." Lionel Trilling, in a chapter on O'Neill in Malcolm Cowley's *After the Genteel Tradition* in 1937, saw in Emma the dramatization of the simpler aspects of Freudian psychology. Eleanor Flexner saw in the strain of introspection and analysis the beginning of the psychologist who was later to submerge the dramatist. Anita Block regarded the play as one of O'Neill's most characteristic works in its Freudian interpretation of character disintegration. And in 1939 Joseph Wood Krutch, in *The American Drama Since 1918*, announced, "on the surface *Diffrent* is a fable for Freudians," but added that this fact did not exhaust its meaning.

On the other hand, few looked at *The Hairy Ape* from the psychoanalytical point of view. Professor Alan Reynolds Thompson in *The Anatomy of Drama* in 1942 was practically alone in describing it as a study in psychopathology in which Yank progressed from incipient to raving madness.

As for the critical history of *Strange Interlude* after the first outburst on its original performance, in 1929 Walter Prichard Eaton wrote of it as "a new form to express the newer psychology," and Ludwig Lewisohn in *Expression in America* in 1932 followed his own Freudian bent by referring to Nina's "frigidity" as a "regressive neurotic." Bonno Tapper in the *Personalist* for January, 1937, dogmatized, "O'Neill's world view is Freudian," and pointed out the Freudian relationships of the characters, their "jargon" (such as Darrell's calling Preston a "compensating substitute"), the surface ritual and taboos in their conversation, and the slip of the tongue at the boat race. Bonamy Dobrée in the *Southern Review* for Winter, 1937, found Nina psychologically abnormal, the victim of a frustration, and Eleanor Flexner in the next year concluded, "Gradually the psychologist has submerged the dramatist," and added that O'Neill treated the psychopathic character as if he were the normal one. Soon afterward Frank O'Hara in *Today in American Drama* predicted that in the future *Strange Interlude* might be looked on as a museum piece because of its preoccupation with psychoses. By 1942 Alan Reynolds Thompson in *The Anatomy of Drama* was calling O'Neill's plays studies in psychopathology and stating, "*Strange Interlude* might have come from the case book of Freud." In 1945 Harry Slochower in *No Voice Is Wholly Lost* wrote of the "split personalities whose duality is heard in the 'double talk'" in this play, and Gassner commented on how the characters "express their unconscious thoughts verbally."

Strangely enough, for two or more decades after the production of *Desire Under the Elms* there seem to have been no extended analyses of O'Neill's transformation of the original Oedipus situation into a modified modern Freudian Oedipus. Richard Dana Skinner in *Our Changing Theatre* in 1930 seemed conscious of this change, but contented himself with remarking succinctly that the play was *Oedipus* modified by modern psychology. Even Gassner as late as 1945 was content to say: "Eben's Oedipus complex, the effects of farm life, and an inhibitive religion are infused into a tragic unit" which makes a "true tragedy."

Dynamo, when it was mentioned at all, suffered under the Freudian charge. In 1930 John Mason Brown in *Upstage* was the harshest when he wrote that recently the world of O'Neill had become a world of "jargon that is increasingly Freudian and pseudo-scientific" and damned the play as the worst example of this sterile scientific research because it "smacks too much of the homework he has devoted to its mastery." Fifteen years later Gassner agreed that, except for the injection of certain Freudian complications into the central character, the hero was "an author's automaton, and what is worse, an unmitigated bore."

Welded, too, was quickly forgotten. Granville Hicks alone, in *The Great Tradition* in 1933, thought it important enough to remark that

O'Neill best stated the pessimism of the twenties in his exhaustive studies of frustration and that *Welded* showed the disintegrating effects of sexual passion. *Days Without End* was also quickly forgotten after its performance in 1934, though it aroused some controversy in the religious press because many people thought it portended a reacceptance of Christianity by its author. The Protestant point of view was represented by Fred Eastman (who was later to write a book, *Christ in Drama*), who in the *Christian Century* for February 7, 1934, said that during the last fifteen years he had watched O'Neill "rise through Freudianism, and materialism and cynicism" until now he "is venturing here upon the plane of Faith, where true artists have always found their ultimate home." On the other hand, James L. Hagerty of St. Mary's College, California, wrote the *Commonweal* on March 2, 1934, that in this play O'Neill was as usual preoccupied with neuroses and psychoses and treated them with crude naturalism. Such subject matter, thought Hagerty—but not all the Roman Catholic press agreed with him—was not proper for treatment in the theater but rather in the clinic or confessional.

The play in which, according to the preponderance of early critics, O'Neill reached his greatest height not only as a dramatic playwright but also as a psychoanalytic playwright was *Mourning Becomes Electra*. Its performance on October 26, 1931, completely bowled its first critics over. The next day Gilbert Gabriel wrote in the *American* that here was "a grand scheme, grandly fulfilled." The author, "hauling his mystical people up the centuries, . . . has humanized them, metapsyched [*sic*] them, changed them from austere creatures of fable into complex creatures of Freud." Richard Lockridge in the *Sun* analyzed the play as "compact of neuroses" that grow out of the story, and two days later returned to the play by calling it "really fine art." On November 8 the *New York Herald Tribune* printed O'Neill's own notes from his diary of the play. Among these appeared such phrases as "modern psychological drama" and "modern psychological approximation of Greek sense of fate." Krutch in the *Nation* for November 11, however, conceded that though O'Neill used current psychology to account for the motivation of his characters the play was not to be regarded as a defense of it. Francis Ferguson in the *Bookman* for November looked at the play from a variety of angles and decided that not only did Robert Edmond Jones's setting keep "the neuroses in countenance" but that "Nazimova completed out of her wide experience with the neurotic moderns what Mr. O'Neill had left as a pale sketch."

Thus, as the critics in the monthlies took more time to consider the play without the glamor of the production, they began to wonder about its merits, and many of the dissenters found its weakness in its Freudian-

ism. John Corbin in an article on "O'Neill and Aeschylus" in the *Saturday Review of Literature* for April 30, 1932, questioned O'Neill's increasing interest in "technical stunts and morbid psychology" as a possible symptom of a decline in his creative powers. He reminded his readers that Freud himself had gone on record against a preoccupation with the "mental underworld." O'Neill, he charged, "has plunged us into the drab and tenuous regions of late twilight. . . . The normal human horror at incest becomes an interestingly Freudian libido. The upstanding manhood of Orestes, his hard fought battle for spiritual release, becomes a weak-kneed and neurotic pessimism ending in suicide. . . . Far from murdering his mother [Orin] is warmly Freudian toward her." It is no surprise when Corbin concludes that *Mourning Becomes Electra* is much more Freudian than Aeschylean.

In the same vein Frances W. Knickerbocker in the April number of the 1932 *Sewanee Review* maintained the inferiority of O'Neill to Aeschylus in spite of some powerful scenes because of the very translation of the ethical Greek theme into a modern psychological motive which reduced the characters to littleness and the language to bareness. Lewisohn, echoing the theme of *Totem and Taboo*, maintained that O'Neill was trying to show the universality of the "incest-motive" in the human heart. Contrasting O'Neill's clumsy and overt treatment of the situation with Shakespeare's implicit handling of it in *Hamlet*, Lewisohn concluded that the American trilogy had strength but no subtlety or tenderness. To Fred Eastman in the *Christian Century* for July 26, 1933, O'Neill, with his belief that Freudian suspicions torment the souls of modern men as the Furies did the ancients, had "the eyes of a craftsman who has dabbled in Freudian complexes, but does not see life whole." By 1937 Tapper in the January *Personalist* repeated that O'Neill's "world-view is Freudian" and admitted that as a psychologist his own interest in the play was partly in the author's "substitution of the love object in the Freudian sense." In the March issue of the academic *English Journal* Thomas Wood Stevens tried to evaluate the play, which he decided was pretentious and not Greek at all. There were, he decided, "scenes of melodrama, quite unashamed, and scenes of inward rot where the author's reading of Freud, accurate or otherwise, weighed heavier than his memory of Aeschylus." Flexner likewise stamped the play as effective melodrama, not tragedy, in which O'Neill related "every occurrence, every trait, back to the sexual impulse, or its distortion or frustration" in the Freudian manner.

By 1946 the damning of the play had reached its high point in Abraham Feldman's "The American Aeschylus" in the Summer *Poet Lore*, in which he styled the play a parody, a caricature of the Greek, and denounced "O'Neill's renovation of the Aeschylean themes according to

the gospel of the late Freud" as "obscene, for he presents the perversion in terms of rhapsody." Even Eric Bentley in *The Playwright as Thinker* deprecated O'Neill's "portraits of neurosis and decay" as "laborious and overconscious striving" in the direction of representing "the bourgeois world as the nightmare which in the twentieth century it became."

When *The Iceman Cometh* appeared in 1946, O'Neill's first play since *Days Without End* in 1934, Rosamond Gilder in the *December Theatre Arts* discussed it as a play which in some measure "restores to the theatre some of its intrinsic stature," but which needed to be condensed to a sharper focus. She regarded it as a sort of summary of many of his earlier plays, in which an Oedipus complex again drove a boy to kill his mother. Edmond M. Gagey, too, found that in this play O'Neill had freed himself from the professional psychologist's language of many of his preceding plays, but that nevertheless "Freud looms in the background."

ARTHUR H. NETHERCOT

[Professor Nethercot's article, "The Psychoanalyzing of Eugene O'Neill," will be concluded in the February issue of MODERN DRAMA.]

MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA AND THE PRODIGAL ELECTRA AND ORESTES

OFF BROADWAY, this season, a striking psychological portrait of a modern Orestes has been created by twenty-four year old Jack Richardson. His play, *The Prodigal*, based on the original House of Agamemnon legend, recreates the spirit of Athenian times.

In the fifth century B.C., a middle-aged Athenian could have seen during his lifetime the original productions of Aeschylus', Euripides', and Sophocles' plays based on this legend. Today a middle-aged New Yorker could have seen the original productions of two great modern psychological dramas based on the same legend, *Mourning Becomes Electra* and *The Prodigal*.

The Prodigal is as reflective of today's generation as O'Neill's play mirrored the mood of the preceding generation. For both O'Neill and Richardson are clairvoyant spokesmen of their respective eras. The late twenties and early thirties were imbued with the new discoveries of Freud. Man's fate and destiny were reshaped and re-evaluated by artists as well as scientists in the context of this new knowledge. O'Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra* succeeded in such an undertaking. In his working notes on this play, O'Neill commits himself to create a drama in which he can "give modern Electra figure (Lavinia) in the play a tragic ending worthy of character." He wanted to convey "a modern tragic interpretation of classic fate without benefit of gods—for it must, before everything, remain [a] modern psychological play—fate springing out of family life."

O'Neill's sense of tragedy, often referred to as his sixth sense, seems to stem from his tragic personal life. Biographical and pathographical studies of O'Neill show that he was unconsciously not allowed to enjoy a happy fulfillment of family life and fatherhood. From this design of his own destiny, he was sensitive to an original artistic understanding that Electra was not fated to "peter out into undramatic married banality." (O'Neill did not note that the Greek word "Electra"—"A-lektra"—means "the Unmated.") He recreated her as an eternally haunted character, such as he himself was. So personal was his empathy, that O'Neill, who was raised in New London, Connecticut, could only envision Electra's tragedy in terms of Lavinia Mannon, a New England character of the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Although he has deprived us of the universality of the original legendary images, his more personal and contemporaneous transformation of the characters has enriched them with more vitality than they originally had. We can more readily feel a personal identity with O'Neill's less dated alternates. His portrayal of the members of the Mannon family finds confirmation in the most recent psychoanalytic concepts on the process of mourning. *Mourning Becomes Electra* antedates the fuller scientific formulations on the structure of mourning by some years. Nevertheless, his is not the mastered knowledge of the scientist. In his attempts to understand himself, his insight is mundane. Only in his created characters does he approximate exquisite psychoanalytic elaboration of personality structure.

Today's young men are the children of O'Neill's generation. The understanding minds of the thirties had tried to instill in this generation the right to be free—as they themselves were not—of unconscious blind ties to their parents. It seems to me that young Richardson is a hopeful spokesman of this effort. The misinformed parents of the thirties, equally in pursuit of psychological liberation for their offspring, reared their children to be free to yell “no!” much beyond a permissible age. The child's negativism was never modified into justifiable dissent and meaningful cooperation because these parents feared that such direction might be regarded as expressed hatred towards the child. To what extent such upbringing has given rise to a flourishing new generation of nihilistic and angry artists and citizens, is an important problem for psychological and sociological research.

Richardson's Orestes can be taken as a symbol of the more successful results of the experimental efforts of the thirties. We see a clear-minded Orestes who wishes to disentangle himself from the pre-ordained, childhood phenomenon of either rigid loyalty to or violent rebellion against his father. Richardson creates a dispassionate Orestes who stands apart from his overdetermined duty to revenge himself upon his mother, Clytemnestra, and her lover Aegisthus, the murderers of his father, Agamemnon. In his Orestes one can find the symbolic spokesman of the young man of today. Unlike Prince Hal, he disavows his father's ideals of the pursuit of power through endless wars. Unlike Hamlet, he looks down upon his mother's infidelity and her lover's usurpation as the misdirected deeds of immature elders who have misunderstood the purpose of life. Orestes is dedicated to self-fulfillment, unhampered by the unfinished business and blunders of his parents. He welcomes his enforced exile from his homeland as his expectant path to liberation. However, state and society will not permit him to marry and dwell in biological anonymity until he avenges his father's death. Thus, he too must bear the yoke of his imperfect heritage.

Unlike O'Neill, who transfigured the characters into a nineteenth century New England family, Richardson has rewritten the ancient tragedy in its original setting. *The Prodigal* retains the sense of the past. Mr. Richardson's personal relationship to the Greek tragedy is more successfully kept out of sight. For this he pays the price of a more cerebral and less emotional drama. O'Neill seems to have been personally and emotionally driven, whereas Richardson appears to be intellectually motivated and personally liberated. Yet, what both dramatists share is the use of the Agamemnon legend to express a modern point of view.

Our great legends are our legacies. They are the highest peaks that creative man has aspired to climb, over and over again. Freud, for example, found that man's universal and major unconscious conflict—the Oedipus complex—was thoroughly depicted in ancient Greek legend. The House of Agamemnon legend is of similar stature.

Man's basic drives are love and aggression. King Agamemnon's inner conflict lies between his drive for power and his love of woman and family. His wife, Clytemnestra, struggles with her needs to love and be loved, with her conflicted loyalty to a long-absent husband, and her murderous hatred of him for inflicting such deprivations upon her. Their children, Orestes and Electra, already damaged by their parents' problems, have still more complex conflicts. May a child kill the mother who bore him, no matter what her crime was? Can such a child live in any sort of peace after the avenging murder is consummated? Muddled by the passions of love and hate for the parents natural to childhood, their dilemma seems insoluble.

These are the problems that Aeschylus, Euripides and Sophocles attempted to resolve two thousand years ago. Shakespeare's Princes Hal and Hamlet bear the stamp of the same theme. One would venture the guess that literally hundreds of plays can be traced to the same source. O'Neill struggled to find a modern psychological solution for Electra. Can an Orestes or Electra finally stand apart and declare himself or herself nonpartisan to parents' lives and demand the right to live one's own life? This is the new solution offered by Mr. Richardson, a young man of today.

PHILIP WEISSMAN, M.D.

EUGENE O'NEILL AND *LIGHT ON THE PATH*

EUGENE O'NEILL did not become a mystic overnight. As a young man he was always drawn to the writers and philosophers who spoke of large forces beyond individual lives. Conrad's awareness of "mystery" was, in part, what fascinated O'Neill in *The Nigger of the Narcissus*; the vision of individuals swept relentlessly about by "the will to live" was what drew him to Schopenhauer. He himself spoke often of the ecstasy he felt when, at the age of eighteen, he discovered Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra* in Benjamin Tucker's bookstore. However, for a long time after he had discovered Conrad and Schopenhauer, and even Nietzsche, Eugene O'Neill was still by no means a confirmed mystic. At Harvard in 1914-15, he thought the materialist philosophers and writers as interesting as the mystics. A classmate found him hesitating, philosophically, between Marxian socialism and Nietzschean individualism.¹ A year later he had made his choice; once and for all time he aligned himself with the mystics and individualists. The catalyst that set off his final choice was a single slender book—that, and the man who believed in and presented him with that book.

The man was Terry Carlin, whom Eugene O'Neill met in New York some time in the winter of 1915-16; the book was *Light on the Path*. Out of the whole of Terry Carlin's enormous influence on Eugene O'Neill, the most vital part, perhaps, was *Light on the Path*, the book that made Eugene O'Neill an active mystic. Certainly, it was Terry Carlin who brought O'Neill *Light on the Path*, for he gave the book to others at the same time. "I was very young in those days," Charles Hapgood would say of the time Terry Carlin brought Eugene O'Neill with him to Provincetown, "but I remember Terry gave me a little book entitled *Light on the Path*, containing Hindu wisdom, and it had a great effect on me for many years."² Similarly, Terry Carlin gave Eugene O'Neill a copy of *Light on the Path*, for one of the first acts of Eugene O'Neill after he had come to Provincetown and moved into John Francis's apartments with Terry was to paint onto the rafters the opening lines of *Light on the Path*:

Before the eyes can see, they must be incapable of tears. Before
the ear can hear, it must have lost its sensitiveness. Before the voice

1. Information in a letter to the author from Corwin Dale Willson (classmate of O'Neill's in Baker's 47), July 27, 1955.

2. From a letter to the author by Charles Hapgood, September 15, 1953.

can speak . . . it must have lost the power to wound. Before the soul can stand . . . its feet must be washed in the blood of the heart.³

Light on the Path, put out by the Theosophical Society, called itself "A treatise written for the personal use of those who are ignorant of the Eastern wisdom and who desire to enter within its influence." Its authors were supposedly two gentlemen who had died many centuries before, so said Mabel Collins—the member of the London Lodge of the Theosophical Society who wrote it—humbly restricting her part in it to "written down by M.C." One of these gentlemen was a certain "Master of the Wisdom," who, according to Miss Collins, had the original rules in Atlantean script from the lost continent of Atlantis, which, theosophists believed, had sunk into the sea in 9564 B.C., after centuries of being ruled by "a dynasty of Perfect Men," the "Divine Rulers of the Golden Gate," whose works, theosophists thought, had survived in fragments in the Upanishads, the Bhagavat Gita, and among the texts of Taoism in China. This "Master of the Wisdom" gave the Atlantean rules with some elucidations of his own to his disciple, the "Master Hilarion," who in turn (after some 4,000 years) caused Mabel Collins to write them down—as she herself announced—in 1884. A year later "Master Hilarion" again caused Mabel Collins—as she reported—to write down explanations of the original rules, and these were incorporated into all later editions.⁴

Whether one believes *Light on the Path* to be a lost Atlantean script with additions by a "Master of the Wisdom" and his disciple "Master Hilarion," or the work of Mabel Collins, a London literary lady with a rich background of readings in the Buddhist, Taoist, and Hindu scriptures, the book itself has poetic beauty and serves as a good introduction to the mystic approach to life. Whatever Eugene O'Neill thought of the authorship (and there is no evidence in any of his writings or conversations that he would have believed literally in the history Mabel Collins gave for her work), he was certainly deeply impressed by the work itself. The opening lines of it, written on his rafters, were to serve not only as personal inspiration, but as philosophical inspiration for much of his later work. *Light on the Path* itself proclaimed that "the pure artist, who works for the love of his work is sometimes more firmly planted on the right road than the occultist" . . . (pp. 17-18). So, in writing the plays themselves, Eugene O'Neill could feel himself on "the way."

Of course, Eugene O'Neill didn't stop his reading of the mystics with *Light on the Path*; rather it served as the beginning of his profound readings in Buddhism, Taoism, and Hinduism—in comparative religion, in

3. Published by the Theosophical Press, 826 Oakdale Avenue, Chicago, n.d., p. 15. For O'Neill's lettering of the lines on his rafters, see Jack Johnson, "Cape Cod Literati Misses O'Neill," *Boston Herald*, August 20, 1939, and Agnes Boulton, *Part of a Long Story* (New York, 1958), p. 139.

4. From the "Introduction" to *Light on the Path*, pp. 3-13.

general—which became his absorbing interest in the next ten years.⁵ Obviously, all of his mystical ideas cannot be ascribed to this one book, but *Light on the Path* does seem to have exerted a profound influence on the structure of Eugene O'Neill's aesthetic creed, which he formulated fully within three years of his reading of *Light on the Path*—in 1919 to be exact.

In 1919, when Eugene O'Neill wrote Barrett Clark his own estimation of his earlier sea plays (which had just come out in a collected edition, *The Moon of the Caribbees and Six Other Plays of the Sea*), he was ready, he told Clark, to "explain the nature of my feeling for the impelling, inscrutable forces behind life which it is my ambition to at least faintly shadow at their work in my plays."⁶ Here was a statement of the basic mystical assumption that would underlie Eugene O'Neill's aesthetic creed. For the remainder of his creative life, his ambition would be to express "the impelling, inscrutable forces behind life." Later, he would tell Arthur Hobson Quinn, "And just here [in seeing tragedy in "the most ignoble, debased lives"] is where I am a most confirmed mystic too, for I'm alway, always trying to interpret Life in terms of lives, never just lives in terms of characters. I'm always acutely conscious of the Force behind (Fate, God, our biological past creating our present, whatever one calls it—Mystery certainly). . . ."⁷

Light on the Path had urged the disciple, "Regard the constantly changing and moving life which surrounds you, for it is formed by the hearts of men; and, as you learn to understand their constitution and meaning, you will by degrees be able to read the larger word of life" (pp. 40-41). It was this "larger word of life" seen through the shifting forms of individual lives that Eugene O'Neill wished to read and to express. From *Light on the Path* O'Neill had learned that once the mystic has discovered the "larger word of life," he will perceive it in all life: "... you will perceive that none, not the most wretched of creatures, but is a part of it, however he blind himself to the fact, and build up for himself a phantasmal outer form of horror. In that sense it is that I say to you: All those beings among whom you struggle on are fragments of the Divine" (p. 37).

Later, when he wrote his explanation of what he called "the mystical pattern" in *The Great God Brown*, Eugene O'Neill showed how consciously he applied the idea that the "strong current," the "great waters" of life, as *Light on the Path* put it, are visible in the life of even the most wretched individual, "however he blind himself to the fact" (p. 37).

5. See O'Neill's letter to Martha Carolyn Sparrow, October 13, 1929, in her unpublished dissertation (Northwestern University, 1931), "Influence of Psychoanalytical Material on the Plays of Eugene O'Neill," p. 77.

6. Barrett H. Clark, *Eugene O'Neill: The Man and His Plays* (New York, 1947), p. 59.

7. Arthur Hobson Quinn, *A History of the American Drama from the Civil War to the Present Day*, 2 vols. (New York, 1945), II, p. 199.

Using an image very similar to the one in *Light on the Path*, O'Neill wrote:

It was far from my idea in writing *Brown* that this background pattern of conflicting tides in the soul of Man should ever overshadow . . . the living drama of the recognizable human beings, Dion, Brown, Margaret and Cybel. I meant it always to be mystically within and behind them, giving them a significance beyond themselves, forcing itself through them to expression in mysterious words, symbols, actions they do not themselves comprehend. And that is as clearly as I wish an audience to comprehend it. It is Mystery—the mystery any one man or woman can feel but not understand as the meaning of any event—or accident—in any life on earth. And it is this mystery I want to realize in the theater.⁸

Critics like Doris Falk have been keenly aware that O'Neill's tragedies are tragedies of the self. Indeed, the chief weakness in an O'Neill play, according to Doris Falk, is the fact that "self-revelation is the one end and aim of all the action; its purpose is not to lead to further action, but to solve the mystery of the self."⁹ Whether or not this preoccupation with the self derives ultimately, as Doris Falk suggests, from O'Neill's own neurosis,¹⁰ it certainly derives on a conscious level from his mysticism. *Light on the Path* exhorts the disciple to seek the "truth" within himself.

Each man is to himself absolutely the way, the truth, and the life. But he is only so when he grasps his whole individuality firmly, and, by the force of his awakened spiritual will, recognizes this individuality as not himself, but that thing which he has with pain created for his own use, and by means of which he purposes, as his growth slowly develops his intelligence, to reach to the life beyond individuality. When he knows that for this his wonderful complex, separated life exists, then, indeed, and then only, he is upon the way. Seek it by plunging into the mysterious and glorious depths of your own inmost being (pp. 24-25).

The ultimate self-revelation, mystically speaking, results, naturally, not in "action," but in loss of self, as *Light on the Path* shows.

For within you is the light of the world, the only light that can be shed upon the Path. If you are unable to perceive it within you, it is useless to look for it elsewhere. It is beyond you; because, when you reach it, you have lost yourself. It is unattainable, because it forever recedes. You will enter the light, but you will never touch the flame (p. 21).

No wonder, then, that many O'Neill plays end with "self-revelation" rather than "action." The real revelation dissolves self. In none of

8. From a letter by Eugene O'Neill, *New York Evening Post*, February 13, 1926. See also Barrett Clark, *op. cit.*, pp. 105-106.

9. Doris V. Falk, *Eugene O'Neill and the Tragic Tension* (New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1958), p. 138.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 195.

O'Neill's plays is this more clearly demonstrated than *The Fountain*—the play in which O'Neill expresses his mystical philosophy most directly, actually presenting the mystical revelation on stage. Indeed, the progress of Juan Ponce de Leon toward self-revelation in the course of this play follows very closely the pattern of the approach to the "light" in *Light on the Path*. At the beginning of the play Juan is obstructed by the blocks to knowledge that *Light on the Path* first warns the disciple against: ambition and inability to love. "Before the soul can stand . . . its feet must be washed in the blood of the heart," Eugene O'Neill had painted up on the rafters in his Provincetown apartment, and Juan Ponce de Leon in *The Fountain* must learn to love before he becomes capable of the mystic revelation. He tells Maria in the opening scene, ". . . I have never loved," when he rejects her love and all love. Maria responds, "God give you knowledge of the heart!" About twenty-one years later, she sends her daughter Beatriz to Juan to "bring him tenderness,"¹¹ and his love for Beatriz prepares him for the mystical revelation of the eternal fountain of life.

Juan's inability to love, as he tells Maria at once, comes from his devotion to ambition: "Spain is the mistress to whom I give my heart, Spain and my own ambitions, which are Spain's" (p. 381). "Sir Glory-Glutton," his friend Luis calls him (p. 389). The first rule for the disciple in *Light on the Path* is "Kill out ambition" (p. 15). However, *Light on the Path* realizes that "only the strong can kill it out. The weak must wait for its growth, its fruition, its death" (p. 16). This is the case with O'Neill's Juan Ponce de Leon, who must learn the lesson inscribed in *Light on the Path*:

Ambition is the first curse,—the great tempter of the man who is rising above his fellows. It is the simplest form of looking for reward. Men of intelligence and power are led away from their higher possibilities by it continually. Yet it is a necessary teacher. Its results turn to dust and ashes in the mouth; like death and estrangement, it shows the man at last, that to work for self is to work for disappointment (p. 17).

By scene three of the play (twenty-one years after the time of scene one), Juan has started to learn this lesson. "Talk is useless," he sighs wearily to Luis. "We do what we must—and sand covers our bodies and our deeds" (p. 398). The remainder of the play shows the dreamer in Juan Ponce de Leon searching for the fountain of youth and finding it ultimately in the mystical revelation that comes to him when he is left wounded in the forest at the edge of a spring.

The "fountain" is, of course, O'Neill's symbol of the eternal life he perceives mystically beyond individual lives. From the beginning he makes

11. Pp. 381, 379, 405. All references to *The Fountain* will be to *The Plays of Eugene O'Neill*, 3 vols. (New York, 1941), Vol. I.

clear his interpretation of the legend of the fountain of youth as simply a form of the mystical revelation. The Moor, who first sings of the fountain, points out that "it is hard to find that fountain. Only to the chosen does it reveal itself" (p. 387). Later, Nano, the Indian, again tries to tell Juan Ponce de Leon that the fountain is not geographically located, answering to Juan's insistent, "Where is the fountain?" that "Only the gods know" (p. 415). When Juan comes to the spring in the forest (where Nano has placed an ambush), Juan must discover that he has been betrayed, that this spring has no magical qualities, so that the audience can appreciate the symbolic nature of the vision of the true fountain which appears superimposed upon the spring.

The fountain as a symbol of eternal life is, of course, not unusual in mystical literature. *Light on the Path* itself uses it: "There is a natural melody, an obscure fount, in every human heart. It may be hidder over and utterly concealed and silenced—but it is there. At the very base of your nature, you will find faith, hope, and love" (p. 37). These are what Juan finds in his vision of the fountain. He finds, through the vision of the Buddhist priest, the priest of Islam, the Medicine Man, and the Dominican monk who "appear clearly for a moment, then fade from sight, seeming to dissolve in the fountain" that "All faiths . . . are one and equal—within" (p. 441). He learns, through the hag who turns into Beatriz, that "Age—Youth— . . . are the same rhythm of eternal life!" (p. 442). And finally, he finds love in the vision within the fountain of Beatriz dancing in ecstasy, "the personified spirit of the fountain" (p. 439).

The whole of Juan's vision of the fountain carries out the description of the mystical revelation in *Light on the Path*. At the beginning of his mystical vision, Juan must overcome his fear. The disciple must, *Light on the Path* says, "achieve the great task of gazing upon the blazing light without dropping the eyes, and not falling back in terror as though before some ghastly phantom" (p. 34). Juan's vision begins with the flooding down of "an unearthly light" in which he first sees the terrible image of "Death" before he can pass on to the image of the fountain (p. 438).

Not only in the "light" that floods Juan's mystical vision does Eugene O'Neill carry out the imagery of *Light on the Path*, but also in the appearance of flame. "You will enter the light, but you will never touch the flame," *Light on the Path* describes the approach to ultimate mystical revelation (p. 21). Toward the end of Juan's vision of the fountain, the water image becomes one of flame in the person of Beatriz: "Her whole body soars upward. A radiant, dancing fire, proceeding from the source of the fountain, floods over and envelops her until her figure is like the heart of its flame" (p. 442). At this moment Juan achieves the

full mystical revelation that dissolves self, and cries exultantly, "I see! Fountain Everlasting, time without end! Soaring flame of the spirit transfiguring Death! All is within! All things dissolve, flow on eternally!" At the end of this scene, he has achieved the mystical perception that brings, according to *Light on the Path*, "confidence, knowledge, certainty" (p. 29). He says to Luis, who has just found him in the forest, "Light! I see and know!" (p. 443).

One further symbol of the mysterious reality beyond self, the "song" of life that O'Neill uses throughout *The Fountain*, appears prominently in *Light on the Path*. "Listen to the song of life" (p. 36), the disciple is told. "Life itself has speech, and is never silent. And its utterance is not, as you that are deaf may suppose, a cry: it is a song. Learn from it that you are a part of the harmony; learn from it to obey the laws of the harmony" (p. 39). The life song in *The Fountain* runs through the whole scene of Juan's mystical revelation, varying in words, but not in meaning:

God is a flower
Forever blooming
God is a fountain
Forever flowing (p. 442)

Within the harmony of this song, Juan Ponce de Leon dies in the scene following his mystical vision, giving the ultimate affirmation of the mystic view of life: "I am that song! One must accept, absorb, give back, become oneself a symbol! . . . O Fountain of Eternity, take back this drop, my soul!" (p. 448). And the play ends with the song of life mingling with the chant of the monks: "For a moment the two strains blend into harmony, fill the air in all-comprehending hymn of the mystery of life as the curtain falls" (p. 449).

The fact that Juan Ponce de Leon is forced to live through another scene after his mystic revelation before he becomes one with the "harmony" may seem awkwardly reiterative to those who read or see the play. Of course, O'Neill needed a final scene to wind up, dramatically, the story of Beatriz and to allow Juan to make the transition from personal love to universal affirmation. O'Neill was justified mystically, too, in not making Juan Ponce de Leon's first mystic vision a permanent attainment. *Light on the Path* describes the moment of perception as the blooming of a flower and points out that

not until the whole nature has yielded, and become subject unto its higher self, can the bloom open. Then will come a calm such as comes in a tropical country after a heavy rain. . . . And, in the deep silence, the mysterious event will occur which will prove that the way has been found. . . . The silence may last a moment of time, or it may last a thousand years. But it will end. Yet you will carry its

strength with you. Again and again the battle must be fought and won (pp. 28-29).

So Juan, carrying with him "the calm of a deep spiritual serenity" (p. 444), from his mystical experience, must battle once again, in the words of *Light on the Path*, to "separate his passions from his divine possibilities" (p. 31) in blessing the union of Beatriz with his nephew, so that he may return to the truth of the mystical revelation that dissolves self.

The Fountain illustrates vividly the mystical point of view on which O'Neill's whole aesthetic creed was based. Although no other single play would reflect the "light" from *Light on the Path* as strongly as this one, that light would illuminate all the mature works of Eugene O'Neill, who would be, in his own words, "a confirmed mystic" from the time he read *Light on the Path*.

DORIS M. ALEXANDER

O'NEILL'S DREAMER: SUCCESS AND FAILURE

Fog, an early play by Eugene O'Neill, written in 1914 and later discredited by the author, depicts the rescue of two shipwrecked men. One of these men, the Poet, the mere sound of whose voice is "unobtrusively melancholy," who is "sick and weary of soul and longing for sleep," at first welcomes the chance to go down with the ship. Then, however, he discovers a woman and a child who need help, saves them, saves himself, and believes that his "past unhappiness is past." The woman and her child, however, die, and when another ship finally picks up the men, the Poet's "face is drawn and melancholy as if he were uncertain of the outcome of this unexpected return to life." His optimistic detour ends, and he remains under the spell of death. In *A Touch of the Poet* a former officer in Wellington's army, years after battle victories and a considerable comedown in status, still lives with uniform and Byron's poems. Finally forced to prove himself and to defend his honor, he challenges the rich offender but is given a beating by the offender's lackeys and is exposed, as he admits, "like a rum-soaked trooper, brawling before a brothel on a Saturday night." Joyful music welcomes him into the common crowd; nevertheless, the act seems "a requiem for the dead." Again, a detour ends.

Fog was written by a newly retired sailor; *A Touch of the Poet* was carved out by the aging and ill playwright as a part of an intended cycle about an Irish family (the O'Neills?) in America. Both end with the defeat of the central figure, the dreamer, who, in 1914 as well as in 1940, even in appearance is portrayed like another man whose "figure was straight and slender; his face lean, the features finely drawn, eyes dark and probing"¹—the playwright himself. O'Neill ended as well as started his literary work with the premise that the life of the sensitive man is aimless and ridiculous. Yet, between these poles exists an extensive detour, and at one point (in *Lazarus Laughed*) the dreamer becomes prophet of universal law. O'Neill, however, loses faith in the dreamer. The dreamer regresses—first, to an old faith which he questioned initially (*Dynamo, Days Without End*), and then to a pleading acceptance by a group antagonistic to the dreamer—the realistic and materialistically secure bourgeois (*Ah, Wilderness!*). Finally, such acceptance is not granted (*The Iceman Cometh, A Touch of the Poet*) because the dreamers are misfits in a practical world and cannot win by

1. Thus Crosswell Bowen in his *The Curse of the Misbegotten; a Tale of the House of O'Neill* (New York, 1959), p. 1, describes the playwright in May, 1931.

its terms. When examining the upward and downward slopes of this thematic development, the question arises—why does the dreamer fall after he has become prophet? The prophet Lazarus, in O'Neill's play, can convince people of the validity of his faith only by personal hypnosis, by his powerful laughter. When Lazarus leaves a neighborhood, "people cannot remember his laughter . . . the dead are dead again and the sick die, and the sad grow more sorrowful." Lazarus is forced to admit himself that "they forget. It is too soon for laughter." The followers do not become integrated with the prophet. O'Neill does not assimilate a prophecy which he has taken almost literally from Schopenhauer,² and which is presented in plays with locales and persons known to O'Neill only intellectually—by wide reading in various religious philosophies. Significantly, his defeated dreamers, both early and late, often have characteristics of down-and-outers personally known to the playwright, and they act in locales directly observed by O'Neill.

What causes an O'Neillian dreamer to emerge? According to the O'Neillian genesis, the world used to be a virginal paradise and man was conscious only of its beauty. His esthetic and nonacquisitive nature made him feel an organic part of this world (Paddy in *The Hairy Ape* remembers that "twas them days a ship was part of the sea, and a man was part of a ship, and the sea joined all together and made it one"). This society in O'Neill's works is usually destroyed. An exception is the nature-children society of Indians in *The Fountain*, which defeats the materialistic invaders. Two types of men evolve as a result. First, the Andrew Mayos, Douglasses, Marco Polos, Browns, Harfords are materialists, seeing the world only in terms of personal profit. Second, the dreamers—the Juans, Dion Anthonies, Reuben Lights, John Lovings—sooner or later realize that man "has lost his old harmony with nature, the harmony which he used to have as an animal and has not acquired in a spiritual way,"³ and they find the materialistic alternative so repulsive that they must retreat from this world. A place of refuge, however, is not easily found. The conventional romantic idea that love can solve all questions is strongly rejected by O'Neill. Even the devoted, striving Margaret and Miriam are helpless and inadequate to understand the problem of Anthony and Lazarus, and the love of Ruth prevents Robert Mayo from his wanderings. Ruth persuades him that the fulfillment of his dreams can be found in their love, and Robert stays, attempting

2. I am indebted for this discovery to Doris V. Falk's *Eugene O'Neill and the Tragic Tension (An Interpretive Study of the Plays)* (New Brunswick, 1958). In the chapter, "On Death and Its Relation to the Indestructibility of our True Nature" (in Vol. 3 of *The World as Will and Imagination*), Schopenhauer writes that "arising and passing away does not concern the real nature of things, but this remains untouched by it, thus is imperishable, and therefore all and each that wills to exist actually exists continuously and without end," and that "it is the species which always lives, and in the consciousness of the imperishable nature of the species and their identity with it the individuals cheerfully exist." Lazarus says, "Once as squirming specks we crept from the tides of the sea. Now we return to the sea," and "Men are also unimportant. Men pass. Like rain into the sea. The sea remains. Man remains. Man slowly arises from the past of the race of men that was his tomb of death. For Man death is not."

3. Bowen, p. 137.

against his nature to become a prosperous farmer. He fails, and Ruth, accusing him of reading books and not working, turns viciously against him. Robert is a vague dreamer, and his statement that he wants to go "on the other side of those hills" and "keep on moving so that [he] won't take root in any one place" is as definite as he can possibly manage about his goal. Love deceives him as a possible answer for his quest, and he dies without making a step beyond the hills.

Yank, the "hairy ape," the only O'Neillian dreamer who is not an intellectual, starts the journey, but it is evolutionally retrogressive. He is forced to realize that the virginal paradise has been enslaved by the pale, sterile materialists and that he, its powerful dinosaur, is their manipulated tool and not independent physical energy. Yet, the enraged and confused Yank attempts to destroy the new order with the old weapon—physical force—and fails. He also commits a mistake when he finally accepts Mildred's beast-image of him as his goal; an ape is a nonthinking animal, satisfied with existence in a virginal paradise, and when Yank turns to thinking, even if it is hard and painful, he is becoming less and less a hairy ape. Thus Yank's act of thinking itself is evolutionally progressive but his decisions and actions are not, and this inconsistency is fatal to him. If, in a moment of shock, Mildred thought of Yank as a beast, the gorilla knows better—the beast does not accept a thinking human being as one of his own.

Juan, the first of the successful dreamers, is thrown into the quest by love,⁴ but he learns to abandon a personal understanding of love and establish a universal one. Although Juan fails to find a realistic fountain of youth, love—an emotion which he did not fully grasp in his youth—returns to him in old age, and thus he is young again. Realizing the eternity of this emotion and its supreme importance for him, Juan knows that emotionally he is eternal. Life itself with its eternal repetitions, with its cycle of birth and death, is the fountain to which beauty and love give a meaning and a value. Juan has sought what is most important and, free from egotism, has accepted life in its natural, universal form; the dreamer has found harmony with nature, he "belongs."

"Death is no more," Juan exclaims and Lazarus echoes; Lazarus, too, knows that "the egotistic concept of personal immortality must surrender to the recognition that all matter is immortal, that all things eternally recur."⁵ Thus, man is free from materialism in any form and degree, and no longer is a Fafner chained by his own gold. The dreamer becomes superior to the materialist because the materialist (Caligula) can rule by threats of physical force, the threat to kill being the most powerful.

4. In fact, it could be argued that Juan's desire to gain eternal youth is a means to winning a young girl's love, and, therefore, is not as nonacquisitive as O'Neill would like us to believe. However, when contrasted with the materialist's desire to build huge bank accounts, it is idealistic enough.

5. Edwin A. Engel, *The Haunted Heroes of Eugene O'Neill* (Cambridge, 1953), p. 183.

When man does not fear these threats any longer, the militant millionaire is defeated, and, consequently, the interpreter of life's secrets, the liberator from death, is king instead. Juan ends his personal life a happy and fulfilled dreamer; it remains for Lazarus to show how such a dreamer can live and teach others to live. Lazarus, however, cannot teach by argumentation, he succeeds only with hypnosis. The happy laughter of Lazarus hypnotizes people while he is with them. Even the corrupt, materialistic Pompeia and Tiberius, momentarily under the spell of the dreamer's faith, can die free of the fear of death. O'Neill, here at his most optimistic, indicates that even the extreme materialist can be converted by the dreamer—but the spell is temporary. The results of a mystic experience can, when demonstrated, dominate an audience, but the understanding cannot be obtained second-hand. And the dreamer may become a philosopher but not a king, a Faust but not a Sarastro.

In *The Great God Brown*, nevertheless, a tormented dreamer wins over the materialist when the materialist desires the dreamer's identity. *Marco Millions* reaches a truce between the two forces; Marco becomes a rich man and is glorified by the populace, and Kaan, disgusted by Marco's worldliness, gives up his worldly power. Free, he can advise his people to "be immortal because life is immortal." The dreamer and the practical man both reach fulfillment in opposite extremes. However, Reuben's quest for new gods leads him back to the acceptance of his initial idol—his mother—and John Loving ends his quest in worship of his wife. Richard Miller's rebellion is shown up as the pose of a dreamer, an action lacking a reason because Richard has not been disillusioned by the world. He can find happiness in reconciliation with his realistic parents and sweetheart. These returns reveal no universal secrets and create no harmony with nature; they are only convenient dormitories for tired men who, as Reuben declares, "don't want to know the truth." Later such a tired dreamer wants not only protection by the powerful but also acceptance; the derelicts in *The Iceman Cometh* have practical aspirations—careers and profits—and Melody desires tribute and glory of the type which greatly pleased Marco Polo. The dreamer no longer has a unique, idealistic dream; he is only a grotesque parasite, a pauper in everything, including ideas.

I have already hinted that O'Neill's successful dreamer was, to great extent, a derived and, consequently, alien figure to the playwright, abstracted from his reading. Lazarus, for example, has been linked not only with Schopenhauer but also with Dionysus as interpreted by Nietzsche, with Christianity and Buddhism,⁶ with the Hindu Krishna,⁷

6. Doris Alexander, "*Lazarus Laughed* and Buddha," *MLQ*, XVII (December, 1956), pp. 357-365.

7. D. V. K. Raghavacharyulu, "The Achievement of Eugene O'Neill: A Study of the Dramatist as Seeker" (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, Ph.D. dissertation, 1959), p. 94. Mr. Raghavacharyulu, however, adds that O'Neill may not have been aware of this connection.

and the idealistic philosophy of Emerson.⁸ O'Neill at various times has admitted influence by authors as remote as Jung and de Maupassant, Dostoevsky and Ibsen. His plays are rich in literary quotations. The O'Neillian dreamer-king's philosophy has a confusing elasticity. The language of the successful dreamers often consists of repeated short slogans while *Iceman* derelicts talk in natural vernacular. The defeated characters are people that O'Neill had known well on ships, in saloons, and in his own family; the successful ones came from books. Failure to O'Neill was observed, tangible; success was abstract.

Psychoanalytical speculation has it that O'Neill was an egocentric writer who identified himself with the dreamer.⁹ Selfhate, supposedly, finally overpowered him, and the dreamer of his later plays is punished in the playwright's place. There is no doubt (stage directions alone prove this) that the dreamer almost always resembles O'Neill physically. Also, he is a poet or a creative artist in some other genre. However, the disillusionment is concurrent with the playwright's increasing illness, family misfortunes, and the gloomy international conditions of the thirties and forties. Hurt by the practical failure of the optimistic philosophers, hurt by increasing American materialism, O'Neill withdrew the dreamer from the preacher's post and turned him into a pathetic and frequently timid character. This character cannot reach even his modest bourgeois goals, and, consequently, he is left with complete withdrawal from any constructive activity "down there at the bottom of the bottle."¹⁰

8. Engel, p. 182.

9. Falk, p. 118. Also consult Dr. Philip Weissman's "Eugene O'Neill's Autobiographical Dramas," *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, V (July, 1957), pp. 432-460.

10. At the time of rehearsals of *The Iceman Cometh*, O'Neill told newspaper reporters that "the present is too much mixed up with superficial values; you can't know which thing is important and which is not." These remarks are quoted by Bowen, p. 310.

JANIS KLAVSONS

O'NEILL AND THE COMIC SPIRIT

THE REACTION OF BROADWAY CRITICS to *Take Me Along* when it was produced in October, 1959, gives an interesting insight into an attitude toward Eugene O'Neill's plays that has developed in recent years. *Take Me Along*, of course, is the musical version of *Ah, Wilderness!* which in New York has featured Jackie Gleason. Critical comment, however, stressed not the comedy or satire, but O'Neill's compassion. The critics revelled in the warmth and tenderness of the play. John Chapman praised Gleason for playing Sid "straight and with engaging sweetness." And though Brooks Atkinson complained that the comedian clowned too much in the first act, he felt that O'Neill's "innocence and sweetness" triumphed over the "razzle-dazzle of a Broadway musical show." He recalled nostalgically how the original Sid had been played by Gene Lockhart as a "tender portrait of an obscure failure who will never escape from his own weak nature."¹

O'Neill's concern with compassion for obscure failures has been more noticed with his last plays, produced since the second world war. But several of these plays have shown another side of O'Neill that has been neglected. They have in them a good deal of rowdy comedy, involving tricks, invective, and a militantly disrespectful mocking of the pretentious.² While this sort of writing may seem new, it should draw attention to the fact that there has been a good deal of comedy in O'Neill's work from the beginning. Many people tend to relegate his efforts in this direction to *Ah, Wilderness!* and perhaps *Anna Christie* (especially since it became *New Girl in Town*).³ The overwhelming concern has been with his tragic tensions. Too often when one suggests that comedy also is an important aspect of O'Neill's work, he is met with, at best, bewilderment. Yet the comic and humorous play an organic part in what O'Neill is attempting.

O'Neill's writing of this nature seems to be of two kinds: there is the kind of satire that Bergson talks about, the traditional mocking of the mechanical, of the self-deluded, of the man with a fixation who cannot bend to adjust to humanity. This is the type of comedy O'Neill first attempted and did at intervals throughout his life. It might include his comic presentation of the "earthly," the normal and human, as contrasted

1. See *New York Theatre Critics' Reviews*, XX (1959), 244-47. Walter Kerr spoke of the gentleness of the work, and exclaimed concerning the sentimental songs, "these things are lovely, just lovely." Of course, critics stressed the tenderness of O'Neill's play upon its pre-war productions. But use of such terms in discussing his viewpoint in general seems to have increased more recently.

2. See my "O'Neill's *A Touch of the Poet* and his Other Last Plays," *Arizona Quarterly*, XIII (Winter, 1957), 308-19.

3. Opened in New York May 14, 1957. While the critics were enthusiastic over Gwen Verdon, their general opinion was that little of the atmosphere of O'Neill's play was left in the musical.

to the pretentious or warped. Roughly, it is social ridicule. Then there is another kind of humor in his plays, a more important, organic one. It involves the grin that arises from agony; it is the humor that is used to divert pain. It is a means of facing despair. The first kind of satire is an intellectual commentary; the other arises out of a very personal involvement in man's plight. Wylie Sypher lumps these types together, but I shall distinguish between them here for reasons of utility.⁴

O'Neill's earliest published plays are marked solely by comedy in the Bergsonian sense of viewing people satirically from the outside. Many of his subjects for ridicule throughout his life seem very similar, from *Royston* to *Melody*. But the manner in which he developed such comedy took on different qualities as he progressed. His satire seems to have changed along with the fashions in comedy in the American theater. Much comedy soon dates. But the fact that O'Neill apparently tried to adapt his comedy to the current vogue suggests that, at least in part, he wrote it in a deliberate effort to sell his plays.

His first plays collected in the so-called *Lost Plays of Eugene O'Neill* include only one full-length piece, *Servitude*. This drama reflects O'Neill's reading of Ibsen in the way it is developed. But it is also an ironic attack upon Ibsenite doctrine that would be popular in the American theatre of 1914.⁵ A young Mrs. Frazer becomes enamoured with the concept of the "new woman" through reading the work of a playwright named Royston. Leaving her loving husband, she tries futilely to make her own career. When she comes to Royston for advice, she is forced by circumstance to stay alone with him in the house for the night. His wife returns unexpectedly and suspects the worst. But as Mrs. Frazer perceives the wife's devotion to the writer and her desire to serve him, she learns the true meaning of love and womanly "servitude." Both couples are reconciled. Ibsen and Barrie are answered. The play's thesis—that love makes one glory in serving—seems to foreshadow O'Neill's conclusion in *A Touch of the Poet*, if either work can be taken seriously.

Servitude presents in the writer a character very reminiscent of some of Ibsen's. Royston is an egoist, something of a stuffed shirt. While he has more sense of humor than Helmer or Ekdal, he fails until the end to recognize the damage his ideas do when rigidly applied. O'Neill produces effective comedy at the end of the first act when, after the lovely Mrs. Frazer has gone upstairs to bed, Royston faces temptation alone over his manuscripts.

The other comedy in the *Lost Plays* reflects the vaudeville tradition of the times. It also serves to foreshadow what O'Neill would do later.

4. Wylie Sypher, ed., *Comedy* (New York, 1956), including Henri Bergson, "Laughter," and editor's essay.

5. For a discussion of the Ibsenite influence, see Doris Falk, *Eugene O'Neill and the Tragic Tension* (New Brunswick, 1958), pp. 15-19.

The Movie Man is not a satire on Hollywood. Dealing with a couple of movie makers who are filming a Mexican revolution, this one-act play depends primarily for its comedy upon their sardonic remarks concerning their surroundings. Although their company is financing the revolt, they are the "heroes" and save a Mexican gentleman from death. Their rowdy commentary suggests that the strain of sardonic comedy of the late plays was in O'Neill from the start. Their remarks also catered probably to many Americans viewing Mexico in 1914.

Doris Falk has rightly pointed out that O'Neill over the years repeatedly contrasted the character of the materialist and the artist, the businessman and the poet. Describing such a contrast in another of his very early plays, *Fog*, she remarks, "With variations, these two are destined to struggle on O'Neill's stage and in his mind throughout his career" (p. 19). It is the variations, however, that suggest to me the influence of vogue on O'Neill's writing. Ibsen's characters are at best only cousins of Babbitt. Fashionable avant-garde satire from the late nineteenth into the early twentieth centuries, and on into the twenties, shows both an interesting similarity and a shift in emphasis. There is an amusing similarity in the stuffed shirts of the different generations. But while earlier audiences laughed at Roebuck Ramsden or W. Burgess, the sophisticates of the twenties were familiar with the egoistic businessman especially as he failed to recognize and foster beauty in this materialistic world.

In the one-act *Fog* a businessman and a poet are adrift in a lifeboat. Much of their time is spent in discussing the plight of the poor. The businessman is selfish and imperceptive. His caricature stresses his lack of sympathy for the underprivileged. There is little that is comic or Ibsenite about him. And the poet's reference to "poverty—the most deadly and prevalent of all diseases"⁶ suggests that O'Neill had lately been reading Shaw.

Granted, *Fog* has the idea that developed into *Marco Millions*, but its concern is almost entirely economic and humanitarian. O'Neill's portrait of Marco Polo was finally completed in 1925,⁷ three years after the appearance of *Babbitt*—and only one year after *Beggar on Horseback* presented its comic picture of the blatant, stupid businessman, Mr. Cady, and the artist trying vainly to create beauty in an uncomprehending business world. Marco carrying his sample cases and talking business jargon, exasperatingly unaware of the beauty offered by little Kukachin, is very much a man of his times. Other aspects of the play show techniques that might be expected in this era. For instance, the stylized repetition of action in the mosque, the Indian temple, and before the Great Wall, to point up Marco's changing viewpoint, would

6. *Thirst and Other One-Act Plays* (Boston, 1914), p. 112.

7. Barrett H. Clark, *Eugene O'Neill: The Man and His Plays* (New York, 1947), p. 107.

not only fit Bergson's theory that repetition is comic but would also suggest the current interest in expressionism. The character of Kublai, however, suggests another not-so-contemporary influence. In his ironic answers to Marco, in his dry comments on Western ways, and even, perhaps, in his suggestions to his granddaughter to be a queen, this humble philosopher-king sounds at times very like Shaw's Caesar. When, after it has been decided to make war on Japan, Bayan pompously announces "reasons" for the act, Kublai comments, "War without rhetoric, please!" (Act III, Sc. 1). This remark should have brought a chuckle from young iconoclasts of the twenties.

Written also in 1925, *The Great God Brown*, of course, expands the satire on the businessman. But *Strange Interlude*, written during the next two years, contains a sympathetic if contemptuous treatment of such a character in Sam Evans. After the close of the twenties and the shift in vogue, the type does not appear again in O'Neill's plays. There are businessmen like Hickey, but they have little relationship with Marco Polo or Babbitt.

There is a certain amount of inadvertent comedy in O'Neill's work. This arises at times through his lack of judgment or when his language becomes inadequate to a situation and he relies upon rhetoric. Possibly some of this last can be traced to his conditioning in the theater of James O'Neill, a conditioning that contributed much to his ability as a theater man but that also had less fortunate results. As would be expected, unintentionally comic dialogue appears most often in his early work, but there are lines as late as the "curse of the Evanses" that make one wonder. A fairly early full-length play that has caused laughter is *Welded*. This deals with a playwright and his wife, an actress, each of whom is so egoistic that he cannot give himself to love; yet they are "welded" by it to each other. To build up the anguish each suffers in the struggle to maintain his ego, O'Neill relies at times upon elevated rhetoric which to some readers has seemed pretty funny. When the play was produced in 1924, Ludwig Lewisohn reported:

The dialogue is distressing. For once I could not blame the well-fed bourgeois all around who tittered and giggled. The speech is the speech that superior Greenwich Villagers would some years ago have imagined themselves as using. . . . The audience laughed.⁸

Another source of inadvertent comedy is sometimes lack of judgment in production. Audiences tend to find release from tension in laughter. On the other hand, when *Anna Christie* was revived in New York in 1952, Walter Kerr complained that the violence of the big scenes was not adequately conveyed:

As a further result, the comedy which has always been part of the play tends to push itself to the fore, and the subtle and lifelike bal-

8. *The Nation*, CXVIII (April 2, 1924), 377.

ances of O'Neill's original piece suffer serious distortion. Humor takes over. . . .⁹

Again, when *The Great God Brown* was revived by the Phoenix company in 1959, Atkinson and others did not feel that the play had dated; several critics noted, however, that the audience giggled at the too-rapid changing of the masks in the last act.¹⁰

O'Neill did not indulge in much deliberate comedy in his work of the late twenties or early thirties, except for the escape he sought in *Ah, Wilderness!* There is satire, of course, in such plays as *Dynamo*, and recurrent attacks on his old subjects, but I do not find much that is intentionally funny. Being essentially a theater man, however, he did not neglect comic relief, and there is an interesting use of it in *Mourning Becomes Electra*. The "chorus" of comic townspeople in this play furnish relief and exposition, and are used to foreshadow in a rather artificial way the theme of "Haunted." But do they not also represent, as a background to the main characters, the "earthy," normal humanity that continues on, like Eliot's women of Canterbury?

The plays first produced after the second world war contain a comedy that is new; it is also a very organic element contributing to what the plays are trying to do. O'Neill wrote most of *The Iceman Cometh* after the war started. The inmates of Harry Hope's saloon, with their comic outbursts and squabbles, remind one immediately of some of the good-hearted drifters with which Saroyan filled his saloon in *Time of Your Life* in 1939. The connection was made at once by reviewers, one of whom saw the play as a combination of Saroyan's and "The Lower Depths."¹¹ Once again, the influence of vogue must be considered. But the comic bickering and outbursts of O'Neill's people do not lead to an assurance of the possibilities of life; they are the cries of the broken, a means of evading the truth, a defense against the end. Atkinson characterized this talk as "racy, angry, comic drumbeats on the lid of doom." What humor there is in *Long Day's Journey into Night*—the watering of the liquor, the sardonic jokes—seems to function to express the Tyrones' unhappiness, or their forced gaiety, their attempt to avoid facing their situation. Even the story of the baiting of the "Standard Oil millionaire" has behind it a sense of antagonism, and quickly leads to bickering.

The raffish comedy that appears in the next two plays, *A Moon for the Misbegotten* and *A Touch of the Poet*, seems a startling development at this point. It is suitable to the Irish characters, and probably O'Neill wrote it with pleasure. Once again pretentiousness is attacked, and with surprising gusto. It is good comedy in itself, and herein lies

9. *New York Theatre Critics' Reviews*, XIII (1952), 396. The critics were attracted almost entirely by the dramatic aspects of the play.

10. *Ibid.*, XX (1959), 282-84.

11. *New York Theatre Critics' Reviews*, VII (1946), 315-20.

the problem. If we look at the context in which the comedy in *Moon* is presented, we may obtain a clearer insight into how it functions and how it should be treated. When we see the rich man baited by the Hogans there is a great deal of zestful invective. There is a Dionysian affirmation of the Hogans' spirit, unfettered and unwashed. But in terms of the mood of agonized hopelessness that envelops the play, in terms of the pathos of Josie's position, one wonders just what effect this affirmation is intended to help produce. Josie can easily turn her coarse humor upon herself. As she says of the broken Tyrone, "He only acts like he's hard and shameless to get back at life when it's tormenting him—and who doesn't."

The humor of his late plays functions effectively as part of his portrayal of people futilely battling life and momentarily evading the truth. Arising out of O'Neill's compassion, it is frequently marked by the grotesque. O'Neill had used the grotesque to comment on existence as early as *The Hairy Ape*. When this play was produced in 1922, even Alexander Woolcott failed to see anything humorous in it, and spoke only of its "nightmare hue and nightmare distortion."¹² The visual comedy inherent in expressionism, here for example in the march of the marionettes, may have amused some audiences. (If one looks at the expressionistic plays produced in America in the twenties—for example, *The Adding Machine*—he will find that the most popular played up the comic aspects of the technique.) But to the more thoughtful, Yank's grimacing at the moon in bewilderment could have a bitterly humorous effect. Yank's grotesque search, in its commentary, could produce what Sypher calls "the mirth of the disenchanted and frustrated idealist" (205).

In view of O'Neill's use of humor in his later plays, it is not surprising that one of the clearest examples of the grotesque is in his last published work, *Hughie*. This one-act play takes place in the lobby of a shabby New York hotel in the twenties. Note the description of the night clerk:

He is in his early forties. Tall, thin, with a scrawny neck and jutting Adam's apple. His face is long and narrow, greasy with perspiration, sallow, studded with pimples from ingrowing hairs. His nose is large and without character. So is his mouth. So are his ears. . . . Behind horn-rimmed spectacles his blank brown eyes contain no discernible expression. One would say they had even forgotten how it feels to be bored. . . .

The play consists of a conversation between this clerk and a hotel guest, a seedy, fat man who in manner "is consciously a Broadway sport and a Wise Guy—the type of small fry gambler and horse player, living hand to mouth on the fringe of the rackets." The entire effect is one of weariness and defeat. The hotel guest, fighting off having to face his

12. *New York Times*, March 10, 1922, p. 18.

lonely room, forces the story of his sporting exploits on the jaded clerk. The clerk strives to anesthetize himself by following the noises of the city outside. ("His mind has hopped an ambulance clanging down Sixth, and is asking without curiosity: 'Will he die, Doctor, or isn't he lucky?'") The play ends as the guest finally discovers that the clerk will listen to his tales of big-time gambling and the two escape into a Walter Mitty world. But the action throughout—the clerk staring into the night, the guest submerged in his own troubles—suggests a posturing that reaches cartoon-like distortion.

Nell says in *Endgame*, "Nothing is funnier than unhappiness." I doubt if O'Neill ever reached this point of resignation. He was too compassionate to consider life merely absurd. His humor in his last plays functions to intensify his portrayal of man's position. But it also is a very personal affirmation of the value of all human beings.

DREW B. PALLETTE

THE WORTH OF *AH, WILDERNESS!*

THE CRITICAL FATE of O'Neill's *Ah, Wilderness!* has been, to say the least of it, peculiar. Nowadays we look with horror at the intentional fallacy; yet we have scrutinized O'Neill's statements about *Ah, Wilderness!* and derived attitudes therefrom.¹ At present a writer's life is considered almost an irrelevancy; yet *Ah, Wilderness!* has been attacked because O'Neill's adolescence was obviously never like that.² Nowadays we are enjoined to look, at all costs, at the work itself; yet we have turned back to O'Neill's earlier works,³ and, finding *Ah, Wilderness!* to be very different, we have, according to our biases, either smiled with relief at the mellowness and simplicity⁴ or winced in pain at what seemed sentimental,⁵ superficial, and false.⁶

To call this unfortunate is a serious understatement. Obviously any play of O'Neill's is worth examining directly and for its own sake. It is the purpose of this paper to offer one such examination.

The major indictments against *Ah, Wilderness!* are to be found, in their extreme form, in the chapter on *Ah, Wilderness!* ("The Jolly Millers") in Edwin Engel's *The Haunted Heroes of Eugene O'Neill*. These indictments are approximately as follows:

1. The play is written in a uniquely mellow, and hence distorting, mood. While still in that mood, O'Neill praised, as the play praises, its historical period and the American middle classes. O'Neill later realized the falseness of these attitudes and returned to his normal and proper view of the American middle classes and of life itself.

2. The play is a "beatific wish-fulfillment dream,"⁷ falsifying O'Neill's adolescence, which it is clearly intended to represent.

1. E.g., Edwin A. Engel, *The Haunted Heroes of Eugene O'Neill* (Cambridge, Mass., 1953), pp. 271-272.

2. *Ibid.*

3. Joseph Wood Krutch's discussion of *Ah, Wilderness!* in *The American Drama Since 1918* (New York, 1939), pp. 113-116, treats the play almost entirely in terms of how it compares with O'Neill's earlier plays. His principal point is that "it is useless to pretend that O'Neill's peculiar powers are anywhere exhibited" in *Ah, Wilderness!* (p. 115). O'Neill's other plays "dealt with ultimates" (p. 116); this one does not. See also Engel's treatment (*Haunted Heroes*, pp. 270-277), among numerous others.

4. E.g., Harlan Hatcher, Introduction to *Ah, Wilderness!*, in *A Modern Repertory* (New York, 1953), p. 146: "Following this series of searching and tragic plays, O'Neill surprised and delighted his world audience by writing a gentle comedy, *Ah, Wilderness!*" (Contrast Krutch's view that the play was popular "partly because the easy minor works of difficult writers have a special appeal to that large public which likes to pay its tribute to fame on occasions which make few demands upon its intelligence or imagination" [*American Drama*, p. 113].) There are also those critics who generally prefer O'Neill's less experimental or "pretentious" or "ambitious" plays, among them *Ah, Wilderness!* See, for example, Eric Bentley, *In Search of Theater* (New York, 1954), p. 231.

5. The word is to be found in Krutch, p. 113, among many other places.

6. Engel, *passim*. Bonamy Dobrée, on the other hand, whose opinion of the play is at least as low as Engel's, finds, unlike Engel, that it unfortunately resembles O'Neill's other plays in dealing with "that stage of adolescent sentimentality in which Mr. O'Neill luxuriates" ("The Plays of Eugene O'Neill," *Southern Review*, II [Winter, 1937], 444).

7. P. 271.

3. The play's picture of life is falsely mellow because it displays "no problem of existence; no fighting of life or fear of death; no problem of hidden motives; no unfulfilled longings, neuroses, or obsessions; no father-son hostility, mother fixation, or marital difficulty."⁸

4. The play lacks depth because the characters have no symbolic significance. Characters parallel to Richard, his father, Sid, Lily, the prostitute, and so on, appear again and again in O'Neill's plays; here, and here almost alone, they are simplified and idealized.⁹

5. Hence the play is, by its very nature, trivial, distorted, and without value; it reaches "a truth . . . about as high as . . . a Norman Rockwell cover for the *Saturday Evening Post*."¹⁰

In the course of the following analysis, I shall presently examine these and subsidiary objections in some detail. But it is clear that, aside from the biographical and intentional fallacies already pointed out, the objections represent mainly an objection to a genre. The assumptions throughout are, first, that O'Neill should adhere to the attitudes, methods, and tone of such plays as *The Great God Brown* and *Mourning Becomes Electra*; and, second, that in abandoning them he has turned to attitudes, methods, and tone which are so trivial and distorted as to be worthless. (The objection is also an objection to the genre in another sense, for the Cybel of *The Great God Brown* would be as out of place in *Ah, Wilderness!* as the prostitute who is simply a prostitute would be out of place in *The Great God Brown*.) This critical approach is almost inevitably fallacious. It is, for example, the genre objection that led to Dr. Johnson's notorious criticism of *Lycidas*; and eyebrows would surely be raised at a critic's objecting to *The Tempest* because it is of a different (and no doubt lesser) genre than *King Lear*. The nature of the genre neither proves nor disproves; there are deplorable tragedies, and comedies of transcendent greatness. The question, Was it worth doing? is, of course, a proper question. But we cannot know whether *Ah, Wilderness!* was worth doing until we see what it has done; and this we shall never see if we start with the assumption that a person who can write tragedy should never write anything else—or that a particular genre is, *per se*, bad.

Ah, Wilderness! is a nostalgic family comedy: a genre which has enjoyed considerable popularity on the American stage. Such plays as *Life With Father* and *I Remember Mama* come immediately to mind. The genre has developed certain conventions. The time is the not too distant past, probably between the eighties and the first World War (the past, most likely, of the playwright's boyhood). The view is, on the whole, benign. The main characters—and character is prominent—are

8. P. 272.

9. Dobrée would apparently disagree: "there is one gain" in the play in that "the harlot is not an earth-goddess, but simply a harlot" (p. 444).

10. P. 272.

likable and well-meaning, though quite possibly comical and exaggerated. The mood is a combination of amusement and nostalgia. There is a child, or children, and it is often clear that the playwright himself is among them. There is likely to be no real plot. The flavor of a certain past, not as it was but as it is remembered, will be (or should be) recaptured; and it is this flavor, plus the comedy of character, which provides such plays with their *raison d'être*. Clearly, the genre is not a major one. Equally clearly, it can be the framework for drama of genuine value, if the comedy and the characters reflect genuine insight, and if the world created provides that suspension of disbelief which romantic comedy of any kind particularly requires. Granted, such a play must look with a certain amount of favor upon a part of American life which it has become critically fashionable for drama to condemn. But there seems to be no sound critical reason why a dramatist must assume an attitude which is critically fashionable.

Before turning to an examination of *Ah, Wilderness!* it may be worth while to examine a play which is commonly considered the perfect representative of the kind: *Life With Father*. *Life With Father* has all the characteristics above listed. Audiences eagerly suspended disbelief year after year. The characterization is broad but not without penetration. The comedy is hilarious and reasonably free from triteness. The upper middle class is scrutinized with a mixture of affection and mild irony. Yet the world is the never-never land of memory where there is no evil. To the audience at least (which joins with the author in witnessing the memories) Father's tyranny is a superb joke and Mother's brush with death itself is not particularly serious; and even to the characters these things seem less serious than they would in life. But in being a perfect representative of the genre—in having all the requisite characteristics and in displaying a maximum of character comedy and a minimum of seriousness—*Life With Father* has, of course, its limitations. Its very perfection means that it strains no limits, reaches out toward no ideas. And therefore "perfect of its kind" does not necessarily mean "best" and certainly does not mean "great."

To make clearer what I mean, one might turn again to *The Tempest*. As a member of the genre of Jacobean romantic comedy, *The Tempest* is not perfectly representative, precisely because its undertones of philosophic meaning and hints of significant intuitions are not generic qualities. Any one of several plays by Beaumont and Fletcher may be a more nearly perfect example of the genre, because it beautifully fulfills the expectations raised by the genre without extra ingredients. But *The Tempest*, because it does use the genre successfully for purposes beyond the normal, is the greater play.

This is precisely what I would claim for *Ah, Wilderness!* For there are

serious matters in *Ah, Wilderness!*, including a recognition of real evil. Yet the play—it need scarcely be demonstrated—has, with the exception of lack of plot, all the stigmata of the nostalgic family comedy, even to the almost inevitable identification of the playwright with one of the children. It seems, therefore, very much worth while to examine how O'Neill utilizes, and how he departs from, the conventions of the nostalgic family comedy in order to reach conclusions about the worth of the resultant play.

First, characterization. Some members of the Miller family are probably somewhat idealized (so are Prospero and Miranda—and why not?), but nevertheless almost all the characters in *Ah, Wilderness!* have some depth. The principal exceptions are Macomber, the typical, narrow-minded, outraged father, and Belle, the typical, sentimental stage prostitute. Round characters are not necessarily better artistically than flat ones, of course, but flat ones are more typically comic, and the creation of round ones is likely to represent a tendency toward more serious (and dramatic) work. The Day family in *Life With Father* is flat, and a wonderful and vivid crew they are; but their lack of capacity for change limits dramatic potential.

There are, of course, several tests for roundness of character. A round character, for instance, is one who cannot be summed up in a formula. This is true of Nat Miller. So far as Richard goes, he is an unusually understanding father; and to some he seems therefore idealized to the point of flatness and incredibility. But O'Neill makes very clear that the exceptional rapport between Nat and Richard derives from Richard's being a near-duplicate of Nat at Richard's age. There is no such rapport, clearly, between Nat and Arthur, the older son;¹¹ and the little that is said about them suggests no such rapport between Nat and the still older sons who have left home and do not appear in the play.

Nat has flaws. Even (or especially) in connection with Richard, he finds it impossible to handle the "facts of life"; he has difficulty with Richard's punishment; he is quite wrong in his attitude toward Sid's drunkenness; he fails to comprehend the tragedy of his sister; he can be hypochondriac about bluefish and forgetfully repetitious about the exploits of his boyhood.¹² We see Nat in relation to Richard (understanding), to his wife (affectionate and comfortable), to his sister (kind but uncomprehending), to Sid (amused, resigned, tolerant, "man-to-man"), to Arthur (sometimes sarcastic), to the other children (fatherly), and to Macomber (outraged). And it is possible to imagine him

11. Which negates Engel's remark that "it is not surprising that the offspring of this harmonious pair—of the fine father and the ideal mother—should be a son who reflects their harmony, their perfection of character" (p. 273).

12. He is not, on the other hand, Mrs. Miller's "little boy." The tendency to regard any piece of wifely sympathy in fiction as mothering seems to me deplorable. Everything about the play makes it clear that Nat is the head of the household, with all that that position implied in the world of 1906. Even Engel calls him *paterfamilias*. He does not always understand his wife, but this is hardly evidence of infantile dependency.

outside the house, functioning as an editor, a town leader, and a convivial celebrator at a Fourth of July stag picnic. Nat cannot be summed up in a formula; he is round. And only the cynical critic—or the critical cynic—would find him too good to be true.

A round character, E. M. Forster tells us, is one who can surprise in a convincing way. Mrs. Miller does:

ESSIE. . . . Well, anyway, he'll always have it to remember—no matter what happens after—and that's something.

NAT. You bet that's something. You surprise me at times with your deep wisdom.

ESSIE. You don't give me credit for ever having common sense, that's why.

This is quite late in the play, and the little dialogue applies to the audience as well as to husband and wife; the audience is surprised at Mrs. Miller's "deep wisdom"; and the audience has failed to give her "credit for ever having common sense." Yet the surprise is convincing. Mrs. Miller has functioned primarily as a mother,¹³ protecting, scolding, housekeeping, worrying, comforting, treating her children as children when they no longer are. (Part of the surprise of the dialogue quoted is that Mrs. Miller shows the "common sense" to realize that one of her children is reaching toward experiences beyond the limits of childhood.) But she has appeared in other guises too: as Sid's sister, who loves him but cannot defend him; as Lily's sister-in-law, who understands Lily far better than Nat does; as Nat's wife. And the audience has gradually been prepared to recognize that she is not merely a stereotype of the American mother; she is a human being.

The character of Lily, too, has some depth. There is a (valid) difference between the surface and the life beneath: like many of Chekhov's characters, she suffers, but also lives from day to day a life apart from her suffering. We do not see on the surface the repressed spinster, though that aspect is there. We see a woman who is believably a good teacher, an affectionate aunt and sister, a willing and helpful member of the household, a woman of dignity and manners; a woman who understands the plight of Sid better than anyone else in the play, a woman who loves and sympathizes, but whose granite determination never to give in has a healthy logical, as well as perhaps an unhealthy psychological basis: for Sid will never change, and the marriage would be a torment to them both and to their family. And she too can surprise in a convincing way: she can quote the *Rubaiyat* and she can lose her self-control.

Sid comes closer to the formula character: the convivial, friendly drunk whom everyone loves and laughs with and perhaps secretly

13. Engel calls her the Mother's Day mother (p. 273).

despises, the boy who has never grown up. Even his other significant traits are not unexpected in the stage type: such characters are often good newspapermen, intelligent, genuinely fond of their families, given to moments of self-pity and self-contempt, and capable (when sober) of real help in a crisis. What probably does most therefore to make Sid more than a stock character is O'Neill's genuine awareness and analysis of his tragedy—not the tragedy of the lone, compulsive drinker, but the tragedy of the man who drinks out of a yearning to be popular and who succeeds only too well.

Another test of a round character is that he be capable of growth. This clearly applies to Richard, who learns much from the events of the play about himself, his family, and the world, and who is changed by what he learns. But to demonstrate the roundness of Richard seems superfluous: he is too distinctly the intellectual and sensitive youngster caught in all sorts of ways between childhood and manhood, advancing one minute, retrogressing the next, but making definite progress in the end.¹⁴

Most of the characters in *Ah, Wilderness!* are round, and their roundness is an indication of another step away from the typical romantic family comedy: the seriousness of the problems. True, the problems are not raised to the tenth power like those in *The Great God Brown* or *Mourning Becomes Electra*. They are poignant, not tragic, and much of the poignancy derives from the fact that the problems are part of a world that is everyday and a tone that is generally comic. Lily and Sid suffer, but the suffering is not the whole of their lives. This is not distortion; it is tragedy that is distortion. Tragedy is the higher thing; but poignancy has its place too, as such domestic plays as *Our Town* and *The Glass Menagerie* also demonstrate. Richard's problems (unlike Clarence Jr.'s in *Life With Father*) are taken seriously by both himself and the audience; and while the immediate ones are solved rather fully,¹⁵ the solution is believable.

But in a play which is after all a comedy and which is decidedly long, it is possible to wonder why the problems of Sid and Lily are included at all. The center of the stage is Richard's. The play is his, and when his more urgent problems are disposed of, the play ends. To add further poignancy by the inclusion of extraneous material would not be justifi-

14. It has been objected that he is too innocent; he has even been called a victim of "sexual anesthesia." But it is hardly necessary to point out that O'Neill in one place ascribes to Richard a "shiver of passionate longing" when he thinks of "going upstairs" with Muriel, to refute the charge. If Richard is free from real temptation, then the play loses half its force. On the other hand, a sensitive and romantic sixteen-year-old need not be physically retarded to resist the blandishments of a blowsy prostitute in a cheap saloon.

15. Engel suggests that they are solved too fully: Nat says that "I don't think we'll ever have to worry about his being safe—from himself—again." Nat's comment is perhaps an exaggeration, but if so it is Nat's not O'Neill's. And Nat (who has told Richard that he never consorted with prostitutes and his implied that he never "ruined decent girls") is judging by himself. This is part of what Engel calls "the sentimental pipedream" (p. 277). But masculine virginity until marriage, while perhaps rare, is hardly impossible, even without "sexual anesthesia." And certainly O'Neill intends to present Richard (unlike his brother Arthur) as exceptional.

able. The material must be justified in terms of Richard—and it can be. For this is, as Harlan Hatcher says, the “*forgotten world of 1906*.”¹⁶ Richard is confused, defiant, and tempted; and the audience needs to know, in terms of his world, what his choices involve. (Richard needs to know, too, of course; and Richard is much taken up with the Lily-Sid relationship, and learns before the play is over something of the significance of his parents’ happy marriage.) On the one hand, Sid; on the other, Nat. There are worse fates than Sid’s, certainly, and O’Neill has dealt with them; but Sid’s is the worst that Richard could know much about within the comico-realistic terms of the play; and ne’er-do-well uncles and maiden aunts living with the family were quite common conditions fifty years ago. (On the other hand, the implication—if it exists¹⁷—that Nat’s course of action will lead inevitably to the happiness that he has is less justifiable, though in a comedy not utterly to be condemned. But I do not think that the implication exists. Lily’s life has paralleled her brother’s in virtue, and it has led to frustration. Nat’s life, then, shows that such conduct *can*, but does not inevitably, lead to happiness. And this is another justification for Lily’s part in the play.)

Ah, Wilderness! has, then, round characters who are credible and whose problems are real—both steps away from such a play as *Life With Father*. Another step away is that the play has a real plot¹⁸ (though Macomber, the villain of it, is given very short shrift). Richard’s behavior leads to an enforced break with Muriel. This in turn leads to his getting involved in moral, psychological, and physical danger in a seashore dive. And his avoidance of the danger enables him to return to Muriel in a relationship which is still innocent and romantic but which is nevertheless at a higher level of maturity and understanding.

More typically of the genre, *Ah, Wilderness!* re-creates the flavor of its particular past (mainly but not exclusively in its pleasanter aspects¹⁹) very successfully. And this success derives only partly from the larger and more obvious details: the quietness of the atmosphere, the longer-lasting innocence of childhood, the greater parental authority, the Fourth of July picnic, the elaborate preparations for an automobile ride, the greater separateness of the masculine world, the attitude toward Wilde, Shaw, Swinburne. It exists also in the little touches: the disapproval of cigarettes as opposed to pipes and cigars, the unusualness of going to college, the songs from the period, the early hours, the tart’s

16. Introduction to *Ah, Wilderness!*, p. 146.

17. Engel seems to think it does, but Engel seems to think that the happy Miller marriage is impossible anyhow: a part of “the sentimental pipedream.”

18. It has also technical dramaturgical excellences, for example the skillful introduction of numerous characters. See Gilbert Norwood, “The Art of Eugene O’Neill,” *Dalhousie Review*, XXI (July, 1941), 148–149.

19. The objection to this may now be seen as an objection to a genre—a genre in which nostalgia and a degree of idealization are almost inevitable. There are, moreover, serious evils in the world of the play. And finally, it seems inconsistent—an inconsistency by no means limited to any one critic—to attack idealization as distortion and accept degradation as reality.

slang. There is consistency, thoroughness, variety; the illusion is created and maintained.

The comedy is less consistently good. Sid's jokes are not so funny to us as they are to his family; Nat's famous embarrassment over the facts of life is after all trite, as is the humor in the mild marital misunderstandings. The comedy involving Richard is more genuine, because he rises so far above the Henry Aldrich sort of business to more than mere adolescent physical awkwardness or voice-breaking or even calf-love. Here is a truly sensitive individual being betrayed into humor by his own body, his own intelligence, his own emotions; and therefore, while the humor may be scarcer and less funny than that in *Life With Father*, at its best there is a pathos in it which *Life With Father* cannot display. The generalization might be made that while flat characters are much more typically used for comedy, yet when the characters from whom comedy springs are round, a dimension is added not only to the characters but to the comedy as well.

Ah, Wilderness!, then, conforms to the genre with success in its evocation of period and with partial success in its comedy—though its best comedy is not typical of the genre; and it departs with success from what is central to the genre in its creation of round characters and its recognition of the possibility of evil and of pain. Therefore it moves, atypically, toward the more serious, and it can be expected to say more than a play like *Life With Father*.

What, then, does *Ah, Wilderness!* say—as *Our Town*, for example, says, “Here is life in its universal pattern”? It says that the world of 1906 was a simpler world—and it was. It says that it has irretrievably vanished—and it has. These two points are typical; *Life With Father* also makes them. But *Ah, Wilderness!* also says that there were problems in that world; indeed, it finds most of the ever-recurrent problems:²⁰ loneliness and misunderstanding, vice and self-indulgence, tyranny and prejudice, even hints of violence and revenge. Unlike more serious plays, however, it describes these problems in terms of a normal family in a world at peace. It says that love can be delightful and ennobling for young and old, but it does not say that this is inevitable—witness Sid, Lily, the tart, the salesman, Macomber, and even Mildred, who wishes that she, like Richard, could be “in love . . . all with one person.” It is quite frankly nostalgic, and like so different a play as *The Glass Menagerie* it employs the “poetic license” of memory. This is a distortion. But all romantic comedy is distortion, just as all tragedy is (as indeed all drama is); and the distortion need not be, and in this case is not, deceptive. *Ah, Wilderness!* does not bare men's souls, but, with perception and depth, it does analyze an adolescent. One critic objects

20. Including many which Engel lists as lacking: hidden motives, unfulfilled longings, neuroses, obsessions.

to the play in the belief that "there is no object in reconstructing the past unless that past is viewed through the eyes of the present."²¹ In other words a genre picture is not enough (and hence, presumably, *Life With Father* would not be enough); a play must have "significance." But may not the significance be *sub specie aeternitatis* rather than for the limited now? Clearly it is so in such family-plays as *Our Town* and even *The Cherry Orchard*. In *Ah, Wilderness!* the portrait of Richard is the portrait of a certain kind of adolescent who must surely have always existed; and we can view him more sympathetically, and hence with more clarity and insight, precisely because the particular causes for which he wants to fight have for us already been won.

In presenting this portrait, and in the Sid-Lily story, in recognizing the existence of evil, in creating round human beings, and in dealing seriously with the affection and passion of love, *Ah, Wilderness!* strains the genre. How far is another question. If no major chords are struck, it may be because the play depends too much upon nostalgia for its attraction if not for its meaning; and admittedly the play does not see around the corner, or multiply levels of significance, or plumb men's souls. Yet with all the principal virtues of *Life With Father*, *Ah, Wilderness!* is far more serious than *Life With Father*, far more perceptive, has far more depth. And hence it seems amply possible to answer the question Was it worth doing? with a decided Yes. Of its kind, *Ah, Wilderness!* is a distinguished play. And the genre, and the potentialities of the genre, gain greatly by its existence.

21. Dobrée, "Plays of Eugene O'Neill," p. 444.

JACOB H. ADLER

THE ROAD TO RUIN: THE BEGINNING OF O'NEILL'S LONG DAY'S JOURNEY

IN HER RECENT, excellent study *Eugene O'Neill and the Tragic Tension* (Rutgers University Press, 1958), Miss Doris Falk has indicated the recurrence of psychological motifs throughout the works of the greatest of America's playwrights. It is hoped that further publication will fully analyze the interwoven biographical content which culminates in *Long Day's Journey Into Night*. Yet Miss Falk, perhaps taking seriously O'Neill's offhand classification of his one "comedy" as a sentimental interim, has dismissed *Ah, Wilderness!* as falling outside both tragic tension and biography. Examination of this play, originally labelled a play of reminiscence, alongside the crushing *Long Day's Journey*, however, abrogates such dismissal and refocusses the "comedy" as a "play of old sorrow." Despite the pitfalls which biographical interpretation sets up, this paper will show that *Ah, Wilderness!* is unquestionably a play of biographical import depicting that time of adolescent innocence which all men pass through just before they are rudely made aware that life can be a bitter experience, that their heroes are not so untarnished as they seemed in their youth, and that a long journey down a road to ruin awaits some before tears and blood exculpate their dead.

Any doubt that *Ah, Wilderness!* is biographical is dispelled by the setting of the "sitting-room of the Miller home in a large small-town in Connecticut" with its "strip of beach along the harbor."¹ Parallels of this setting with the living room of the Tyrones' (O'Neills') summer home at New London are conclusive:

Ah, Wilderness!

Beneath the two windows at left, front, a sofa with silk and satin cushions stands against the wall. At rear of sofa, a bookcase with glass doors, filled with cheap sets, extends along the remaining length of wall.

In the rear wall, left, is a double doorway with sliding doors and portières,

Long Day's Journey

In the left wall, a similar series of windows looks out . . . Beneath them is a wicker couch with cushions . . . Farther back is a large, glassed-in bookcase with sets of [various authors] . . .

At rear are two double doorways with portieres . . . the other opens on a dark,

1. Quotations are cited from the 1933 Random House edition of *Ah, Wilderness!* and the 1956 Yale University Press edition of *Long Day's Journey Into Night*. We should note that this moonlight-flooded strip of beach with an orchestra from a summer hotel playing in the distance is just removed from the moonlight-flooded pier of the Casino in the Prologue and Epilogue of *The Great God Brown*. General likenesses of sets and "persistent memories" between the two plays here examined have also been noted by Drew B. Pallette, "O'Neill's *A Touch of the Poet* and His Other Last Plays," *Arizona Quarterly*, XIII (1957), 310-312.

leading into a dark, windowless back parlor.

At right of this doorway, another bookcase, this time a small, open one, crammed with boys' and girls' books and the best-selling novels of many past years—books the family really have read.

To the right of this bookcase is the mate of the double doorway at its left, with sliding doors and portières, this one leading to a well-lighted front parlor.

In the right wall, rear, a screen door opens on a porch. Farther forward in this wall are two windows, with a writing desk and a chair between them.

At center is a big, round table with a green-shaded reading lamp, the cord of the lamp running up to one of five sockets in the chandelier above.

Five chairs are grouped about the table—three rockers at left, right, and right rear of it, two armchairs at rear and left rear.

A medium-priced, inoffensive rug covers most of the floor. The walls are papered white with a cheerful, ugly blue design.

windowless back parlor . . .

Against the wall between the doorways is a small bookcase . . . containing novels . . . the astonishing thing about these sets is that all the volumes have the look of having been read and reread . . .

The one at right leads into a front parlor with the formally arranged, set appearance of a room rarely occupied . . .

In the right wall, rear, is a screen door leading out on the porch . . . Farther forward, a series of three windows looks over the front lawn . . . A small wicker table and an ordinary oak desk are against the wall, flanking the windows . . .

At center is a round table with a green shaded reading lamp, the cord plugged in one of the four sockets in the chandelier above.

Around the table within reading-light range are four chairs, three of them wicker armchairs, the fourth (at right front of table) a varnished oak rocker with leather bottom . . .

The hardwood floor is nearly covered by a rug, inoffensive in design and color . . .

For O'Neill, then, the scene of the Millers' home is that of his family's summer home; the place, New London; and the time, given as July 4, 1906, the summer between his graduation from Betts Academy in Stamford in June, 1906, and his entry into Princeton University for one hectic year in September, 1906. (Note that the setting for the Prologue of *The Great God Brown* is the middle of June at a Commencement dance.)

Jamie, aged thirty-three, tells us in *Long Day's Journey* that Edmund, aged twenty-three, never knew what was really wrong (that is, was not aware of their mother's narcotic addiction) until he was in prep school, but that he, Jamie, was wise ten years or more before Edmund had to be told. Edmund finally had to be told because of that disastrous night when Mary Tyrone had run out of their summer home in her nightdress to throw herself off the dock. The evidence seems to point to the summer of 1906 as the date of this shattering knowledge: it occurred during a summer when they were in New London, it was apparently before Edmund entered college and this summer would still be considered his

prep school days, Jamie was ten years older than Edmund and therefore would have known about the family problem at an age slightly younger than that at which Edmund discovered the truth, Jamie seems to have begun his dissolute life toward the close of his boarding school years, Edmund (Eugene) involved himself in a cataclysmic first year at college, and *Ah, Wilderness!* and *The Great God Brown* indicate the importance of this particular summer to O'Neill.²

Richard at seventeen in 1906 is the young Edmund of twenty-three in 1912 (both correctly corresponding to O'Neill's ages). "In appearance [Richard] is a perfect blend of father and mother, so much so that each is convinced he is the image of the other. He has his mother's light-brown hair, his father's gray eyes; his features are neither large nor small; he is of medium height, neither fat nor thin. . . . There is something of extreme sensitiveness added—a restless, apprehensive, defiant, shy, dreamy, self-conscious intelligence about him . . . a posey actor solemnly playing a role." Six years and much alcohol, roustabouting, and sickness later, he, as Edmund, is described as "a couple of inches taller [than Jamie, who is about five feet nine], thin and wiry. Where Jamie takes after his father, with little resemblance to his mother, Edmund looks like both his parents, but is more like his mother. Her big, dark eyes are the dominant feature in his long, narrow Irish face. . . . His high forehead is hers accentuated, with dark brown hair. . . . His mouth has the same quality of hypersensitiveness hers possesses. . . . [His hands] even have to a minor degree the same nervousness." And as his mother tells him, "You love to make a scene out of nothing so you can be dramatic and tragic." Both Richard and Edmund, it is said, should be on the stage. Both read a lot, are termed anarchistic; they are revolutionaries because of their reading, because of their sense of injustice in the world, because of their anathema for the landlord class. Books and authors are specified in the Tyrone household; others are mentioned or quoted. Of these the Miller bookshelves have contained, we know from Richard's reading and quotation, Shaw, Swinburne, Wilde, Ibsen, and Kipling.³ (Kipling's inclusion with the other denizens

2. The remarks of Crosswell Bowen in *The Curse of the Misbegotten* (New York, 1959) imply that Eugene discovered the truth while at Betts, but it is obvious that here (and *passim*) Bowen is repeating a general statement from *Long Day's Journey*. Arthur and Barbara Gelb, in "Start of a Long Day's Journey," *Horizon*, II (1960), 25-40, also imply earlier awareness. Since O'Neill's chronology and factual occurrences are often rearranged for dramatic effect, as the Gelbs show, we cannot be certain of the date of awareness on the basis of the current evidence.

3. Richard's reading includes Carlyle's *French Revolution*, which he is surprised to find his father has read and considers a "damn fine book." His talk of Mirabeau and Marat and Robespierre is cut short by Mrs. Miller, who appears in a great state of flushed annoyance, saying, "Never you mind Robespierre, young man!" Here O'Neill, who always yearned to write a play about Robespierre, seems to envelop another personal reminiscence. Mary, we are told (although O'Neill may be in error about this), met James Tyrone during Easter vacation thirty-six years before when her father took her backstage after a performance of "a play about the French Revolution and the leading part was a nobleman. I couldn't take my eyes off him. I wept when he was thrown into prison." Bowen, p. 11, tells us that the play was *A Tale of Two Cities* enacted in Cleveland (where the Quinlans lived), although he gives no source for this knowledge and although his chronology is confusing. Undoubtedly the leaders and manipulators of the Revolution, since they were the cause of James's plight for which Ella Quinlan wept, would have become for the four haunted O'Neills the symbol of their curse, for with this it all began.

of both the Miller and Tyrone libraries is almost enough to give away the link between the two families.)

Essie Miller, around fifty in 1906, is fifty-four in 1912. She is "a short, stout woman with fading light-brown hair sprinkled with gray, who must have been decidedly pretty as a girl in a round-faced, cute, small-featured, wide-eyed fashion. She had big brown eyes soft and maternal. . . ." As Mary, Ella Quinlan O'Neill is delineated as "about medium height. She still has a young graceful figure, a trifle plump, but showing little evidence of middle-aged waist or hips . . . [Her face] must once have been extremely pretty, and is still striking. . . . Her high forehead is framed by thick, pure white hair [which once was "a rare shade of reddish brown"] . . . her dark brown eyes appear black. They are unusually large and beautiful. . . ." The primness of Mrs. Miller, of course seen through a young revolutionary's eyes, reflects itself in Mary Tyrone's admonishing of Edmund for using "such language" before her as "God damn you!" "Don't, you crazy!" cries Essie, "pulling away—embarrassedly, almost blushing" when Nat kisses her; Mary hasn't changed: "You mustn't be so silly, James. Right in front of Jamie!"

Nat Miller in his late fifties is sixty-five as James Tyrone. The tallness, sparseness, and shoulder stoop which the young Richard sees in his father are somewhat altered in Edmund's older, taller view: "five feet eight, broad-shouldered and deep-chested, he [Tyrone] seems taller and slenderer because of his bearing." Nat is "more than a little bald, dressed with an awkward attempt at sober respectability imposed upon an innate heedlessness of clothes. His long face has large, irregular, undistinguished features, but he has fine, shrewd, humorous gray eyes." In parallel is the great actor: "His grey hair is thin with a bald spot like a monk's tonsure. . . . He wears a threadbare ready-made, grey sack suit and shineless black shoes. . . . There is nothing picturesquely careless about this get-up. It is commonplace shabby. . . . [He has] a big, finely shaped head, a handsome profile, deep-set light-brown eyes." With Edmund on "a hick town rag" (Eugene's association with a newspaper in New London) and Jamie's talk of becoming a newspaper man, it is understandable why Nat Miller is fictionalized as owner of the *Evening Globe* (and why Sid Davis has worked for a while on the *Waterbury Standard*).⁴ Underneath Nat's good husband and father exterior lurks one of James's faults, a fault which Mary gives as the reason for her loneliness and short-lived happiness: "You should have remained a bachelor and lived in second-rate hotels and entertained your friends in barrooms! . . . You will be drunk tonight. Well, it won't be the first time, will it—or the thousandth?" Nat likes frequently to meet with the boys

4. O'Neill used as prototype a family he knew in New London, but the flesh on these skeletal figures belongs to the O'Neills. The early belief that O'Neill had drawn on personal experience, though denied by him, is here finally established as accurate. The Gels cannot be correct when they indicate only a superficial relationship between the Millers and the O'Neills.

of the Sachem Club and is "just mellow and benignly ripened" after the picnic, kissing Essie and slapping her jovially on her fat buttocks. Apparently with a few drinks under his belt, Nat starts to narrate "all those old stories of his about when he was a boy," stories which change in detail with each telling, rambling in "reminiscent obsession." This is, of course, Tyrone who recites the same "machine shop story ten thousand times," who gabs with old Captain Turner, "telling him of the time when—."⁵

Jamie is seen in two characters of the earlier play. First there is Arthur, aged nineteen, a student at Yale, "tall, heavy, barrel-chested and muscular. . . ." He is a lady-killer, a collegiate big-time operator, dressed in padded shoulders and half-pegged pants, a hell-raising sport like his classmate Wint Selby. Through Wint we come to see Arthur, still pictured naive about Wilde's "bigamy" and still happy to spend the evening with his girl, Elsie Rand, and her parents, when he is not under his elders' eyes. Jamie, thirty-three and dissipated in 1912, "has his father's broad-shouldered, deep-chested physique, is an inch taller [around five feet nine] and weighs less. . . ." He has thrown away his salary every week on whores and whiskey; he has been fired in disgrace from every college he attended; he is a "beguiling ne'er-do-well, with a strain of the sentimentally poetic, attractive to women and popular with men." Arthur does not wholly square with Jamie; rather he is drawn in the guise of the older brother-hero remembered by Richard, the innocent boy. But the elements for the older Jamie are all present, including the "sentimentally poetic" strain and the singer of songs, afraid of Papa's disapproval.

Second there is Sid Davis, who, though he is forty-five, is an older Jamie, a grown-up Arthur: he has the "Puckish face of a Peck's Bad Boy," he is dressed in a once very natty loud light suit which is now shapeless and faded, he is a drunk and profligate who knows all the whores and bed houses. He is fired from his newspaper job, like Jamie, because of his drunkenness. Sid, who is always running into old friends, is a victim of them, being easily led. And just like Jamie, he is "irresponsible, never meaning to harm but harming in spite of himself."

Connected with Sid and his failing are interesting, though biographically confused and inconsistent, passages which reflect Mary Tyrone's affliction. Like Mary's addiction, Sid's drunkenness is a skeleton-in-the-closet, but even little Tommy knows about it and Lily learns soon enough about the relapse in Waterbury, always remembering that party which caused her to break their engagement. (Compare Mary's midsummer flight to the dock and her continuing return to narcotic mixtures.) There is a constant foghorn in *Long Day's Journey*, and Mary complains that the snoring of her husband, who snores "especially when he's had

5. Agnes Boulton in *Part of a Long Story* (New York, 1958), p. 230, has informed us of the family joke about the senior O'Neill's obsession of being poisoned from eating bluefish, an obsession shared by Nat Miller.

too much to drink" and whom "ten foghorns couldn't wake," causes her to rise in the middle of the night and go to the spare bedroom. These remembrances appear oddly in the following dialogue, which refers to Sid's sleeping off his drunk:

TOMMY: Uncle Sid was snoring like a fog horn—and he's right next to my room. How can I ever get to sleep while he's— . . .

MRS. MILLER: I guess you'd get to sleep all right if you were inside a fog horn.

A most revealing parallel between Sid with a hangover and Mary after a fix is this:

In the midst of this, Sid enters through the front parlor. All the effervescence of his jag has worn off and he is now suffering from a bad case of hangover—nervous, sick, a prey to gloomy remorse and bitter feelings of self-loathing and self-pity. . . . He sidles into the room guiltily, his eyes shifting about, avoiding looking at anyone.

Mary enters from the front parlor. At first one notices no change except that she appears to be less nervous, . . . but then one becomes aware that her eyes are brighter, and there is a peculiar detachment in her voice and manner. . . . Her hands play restlessly over the table top. She does not look at Jamie but she feels the cynically appraising glance he gives her face and hands.

MARY: *Tensely.* Why do you stare like that? . . .

Disturbed by [Edmund's] coming, gives way to a flurry of guilty, nervous excitement.

But it is the sardonic humor of the following that shows that O'Neill's "comedy" is not all that it has been supposed, for all we have to do is remember his mother's experience to see the bitterness of his pen:

sid [poking fun at Lily whom he calls "a slave to rum"]: What can we do to save her, Nat? . . . Better put her in institution where she'll be removed from temptation! The mere smell of it seems to drive her frantic!

There is a fourth character in *Long Day's Journey*, the second girl, Cathleen, seen first at the beginning of Act II when she is in the midst of lunch preparations. "She is a buxom Irish peasant, in her early twenties, with a red-cheeked comely face, black hair and blue eyes—amiable, ignorant, clumsy, and possessed by a dense, well-meaning stupidity." Later, "her stupid, good-humored face wears a pleased and flattered simper." The Millers' second girl, Norah, who also speaks with a heavy brogue, also is first seen at the beginning of Act II when she is in the midst of supper preparations. She "is a clumsy, heavy-handed, heavy-footed, long-jawed, beamingly good-natured young Irish girl—a 'green-horn.'" And to complete the cast of characters, though unseen, there is Bridget, the cook, in the Miller home in 1906 and in the Tyrone home in 1912.

The plot and action are, of course, dissimilar, yet it is interesting to observe certain likenesses. *Ah, Wilderness!* begins at 7:30 a.m., with morning sunlight flooding the sitting-room and noises clamoring from the breakfast table, the members of the family, finished eating, soon entering upon the stage. In *Long Day's Journey* only the time, 8:30, is changed. Act II not only brings the second girl on the set—for supper in the earlier play, for lunch in the later one—it also provides the drunk scene for Sid and the first scene in which we see Mary under the influence of dope. Then too it is the act in which Richard is invited down the road to ruin by Wint, who goes upstairs to bed with Edith, and the act in which Edmund and Jamie leave to go to town—Edmund to have a few drinks and to return, sad and dejected, for supper, Jamie to remain at "Mamie's dump" with Fat Violet and the soft music of John Barleycorn inside. The barroom scene of *Ah, Wilderness!* is left to the imagination of the audience viewing Edmund's misery from the knowledge that he must spend six months at a sanatorium. But in Act III the anxious waiting of Essie Miller, who cannot accept her favorite son's growing up, becomes the anxiety and rationalization of Mary, who will not admit her favorite son's condition or face the changes which come with time. Again through unity of place, O'Neill does not show us Edmund walking out on the beach as he shows us Richard in the second scene of Act IV in the earlier play, but we are made well aware of his thoughts as he observes the unreality created by the fog. The general outlines of the two plays are similar, attesting to their meaning and truthfulness for O'Neill in his tortured memory.

In *Ah, Wilderness!* O'Neill has written a play concerned with the time when he was happy in his innocence and ignorance—a time when Papa was good and kind, respected and admired, when Mama was the loving consoler to whom the little boy looks for reassurance and hope, not a ghost to work a knife in the depths of one's soul. In it he tried to convince himself that Mary's words are true: "Only the past when you were happy is real." But he could not completely submerge his remembrance of old sorrow. The happy remembrances of Mary—her father, her music, the convent, her meeting with James, her marriage, her wedding gown—are, she also tries to tell herself, the real ones, but the ones that she can't lie out of are her honeymoon, her husband's drinking, the death of Eugene, the jealousy of Jamie, her loneliness, and her addiction to narcotics. The play has many memories—Tyrone's, Jamie's, Edmund's—but it is Mary's and the memories of Mary which cannot be obliterated. There are happy reminiscences in *Ah, Wilderness!* but O'Neill knew that the undercurrent still flowed beneath. Sid's trip to New York, for example, is a disconcerting remembrance for all: Lily can't forget it, Sid can't lie out of it. When Arthur sings "Then You'll Remember Me,"

"the effect on his audience is instant. Miller gazes before him with a ruminating melancholy, his face seeming to become gently sorrowful and old. Mrs. Miller stares before her, her expression becoming more and more doleful. Lily . . . her face growing tragically sad. As for Sid, he is moved to his remorseful, guilt-stricken depths." Are not these the Tyrones? The memories are the same: the "me" whom O'Neill remembers is Ella. The point of the quotation from Omar and the title of the play is that the wilderness of youth is never paradise enow. Conjure up the paradise of the past and yet you must face your dead before you can rest.

The tragic summer of 1906 had brought an end to O'Neill's "sweet-scented" youth, had set him, "in peg-top trousers," at "the pace that kills along the road to ruin." His *Night* had been until September, 1932, Edmund's fog; he had tried desperately to drink, to travel, to work himself out of his memories. But it was not until three years after his marriage to Carlotta Monterey⁶ that O'Neill finally was able to accept Omar's moving finger. After so many years of tears and blood, of silence and despair, O'Neill finally faced his ghosts but not quite squarely. This was the world just before that accursed time, this is how it all began. As Richard Dana Skinner had remarked (*Eugene O'Neill: A Poet's Quest* [New York, 1935], p. 227): "It [*Ah, Wilderness!*] marked an end to that terrible fear which had made every symbol of youth appear like some hideous monster." Once having undergone the catharsis of acceptance of the past, no longer trying to cancel even half a line of it, O'Neill finally put the whole business down relentlessly in *Long Day's Journey* in 1941, "with deep pity and understanding and forgiveness for all the four haunted" O'Neills.

6. O'Neill was now able to say through Nat that "spring isn't everything, is it . . . ? There's a lot to be said for Autumn. That's got beauty, too. And winter—if you're together."

JOHN T. SHAWCROSS

AMOR FATI: O'NEILL'S LAZARUS AS SUPERMAN AND SAVIOR

"YE HIGHER MEN, LEARN, I PRAY YOU—TO LAUGH!"

—Thus Spake Zarathustra

1

O'NEILL may be said to have thought emotionally, or—to put it the other way—to have been profoundly moved by ideas. He was an artist and not a philosopher, but he asked himself ultimate questions, brooded over them, sought answers to them in Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Lao-tze, and gave them emotional expression in his plays.

Thus Schopenhauer's dictum that tragic heroes, when they are defeated, atone for the crime of existence itself rather than for their own individual sins,¹ is the source of the following remark by the illiterate stoker, Yank Smith:

POLICEMAN. What you been doin'?

YANK. Enuf to gimme life for! I was born, see? Sure, dat's de charge. Write it in de blotter. I was born, get me?

Schopenhauer's pessimism in the idiom of the Brooklyn waterfront is an engaging, even a moving, anomaly. The point to be noted here, however, is that a metaphysical abstraction had become so familiar a strand in O'Neill's way of thinking—or better, perhaps, in his way of feeling—that he was able to weave it without self-conscious effort into the emotional fabric of *The Hairy Ape*.

Modern man, we are constantly being reminded, is in desperate need of the spiritual comfort provided by religious certainty, but the acids of modernism have dissolved all but the last vestiges of his faith in transcendence. O'Neill dramatizes this dilemma in *The Great God Brown*. As the curtain rises on the first act, Dion Anthony is sitting at a table, staring into space, his mask hanging on his breast.

Suddenly he picks up a copy of the New Testament, opens it at random, and reads aloud: "Come unto me all ye who are heavy laden and I will give you rest."

His face lights up from within. "I will come," he whispers, "but where are you, Savior?" A door is heard shutting: someone has entered the house. Dion claps on his mask, ashamed of his credulity, and tosses the Testament aside.

1. *The World as Will and Idea*, II, 51. Schopenhauer cites Calderon, who expresses a similar thought: "Pues el delito mayor del hombre es haber nacido."

"Blah!" he sneers. "Fixation on old Mama Christianity! You infant blubbering in the dark!" He laughs in bitter self-contempt.

Here, and in *The Great God Brown* as a whole, the metaphysical conflict between Christianity and naturalism is given emotional expression in terms of the psychological conflict that splits the protagonist's ego and eventually destroys him. In other words, *The Great God Brown* is a play about a human being's reaction to a metaphysical dilemma. It is not, strictly speaking, about the dilemma itself, for it is a work of dramatic literature and not a theological tract.

The duality implicit in *The Great God Brown* is resolved in the last act when Brown, Dion's successor, dies with the prayer "Our Father Who Art" on his lips. The omission of the words "in Heaven," and the fact that the prayer is taught him by the Earth Mother, signify that Brown believes in a God, but not in the God of Christianity, and not in the immortality of the individual soul. By way of compensation he finds the justification of life in the biological cycle, eternally repeated, of birth, suffering, and death.

"Who art! Who art!" he cries exultantly.

BROWN. I know! I have found Him! I hear Him speak! "Blessed are they that weep, for they shall laugh!" Only he that has wept can laugh! The laughter of Heaven sows earth with a rain of tears, and out of Earth's transfigured birth-pain the laughter of Man returns to bless and play again in innumerable dancing gales of flame upon the knees of God! (*He dies.*)

CYBEL. Always spring comes again bearing life! Always again! Always, always forever again!—Spring again!—life again!—summer and fall and death and peace again!—but always, always, love and conception and birth and pain again!—bearing the glorious, blazing crown of life again! (*She stands like an idol of Earth, her eyes staring out over the world.*)

This is the tragic culmination of the story: Brown achieves inner peace and dies. But O'Neill's verbal ineptitude comes perilously close to reducing what he intended to be Brown's mystical assertion of his naturalistic faith to a sentimental absurdity. The drama all but evaporates, and only the specious poetry remains.

Just before the final curtain, however,—after Margaret has had her chance to be poetical,—O'Neill reverts to the technique of *The Hairy Ape* and almost salvages the final scene. The police captain, who thinks Anthony has killed Brown (and symbolically he is right), re-enters in order to question Cybel.

CAPTAIN. Well, what's his name?

CYBEL. Man!

CAPTAIN (*taking a grimy notebook and an inch-long pencil from his pocket*). How d'yuh spell it?

(*Curtain*)

Juan in *The Fountain*, an earlier play than *The Great God Brown*, is a divided soul like Dion Anthony and the later Brown, and he too is destroyed by the struggle between his two selves. Before he dies, moreover, he discovers, as Brown does, that God (being) and the phenomenal world (becoming) are one—I do not think I am misrepresenting O'Neill's thesis—and that immortality means the cyclical regeneration of the biological abstraction Man. His conversion to this creed gives him "the calm of deep serenity," and he is reabsorbed by the material universe (i.e., he dies) in a state of ecstatic happiness. The theme of *The Fountain* and the theme of *The Great God Brown*, as expressed in their concluding lines, are thus seen to be identical.

2

Lazarus Laughed reiterates this theme. O'Neill wrote it in 1925 and 1926, immediately after finishing *The Great God Brown* and before beginning *Strange Interlude*. The ideas embodied in it had been germinating in him ever since his New London days, before World War I, when he first read *Zarathustra* and *The Birth of Tragedy*. They are Nietzsche's ideas, for the most part, but O'Neill felt then, and for many years afterward, that they answered various troublesome questions that he and other cosmically alienated moderns were asking themselves in the 1920's.

My object in the present essay is to consider some of the ways in which the influence of Nietzsche's philosophy is revealed in *Lazarus Laughed*. I shall stress, in particular, O'Neill's re-interpretation of Nietzsche's doctrines of the superman,² *amor fati*, eternal recurrence, and pity. I shall also (by way of conclusion) touch briefly on O'Neill's failure (I take his failure for granted) to transmute Nietzsche's ideas into effective drama.

O'Neill was under the illusion, when writing *Lazarus Laughed*, that Nietzsche's philosophy of power could fill the vacancy caused by modern man's loss of faith in God and religion. He created Lazarus, therefore, in the image of a Nietzschean superman, assigned him the dual role of savior and tragic hero, and made him the spokesman for the dying Brown's naturalistic creed. This creed, as we shall see, is a variation of Nietzsche's *amor fati*, and O'Neill thought at the time that it could teach modern man how to live joyously and die fearlessly. He did not consider modern Christianity capable of fulfilling either of these primary religious functions.

The will-to-power—the unifying principle of Nietzsche's philosophy—is variously manifested in the attitudes and conduct of all the characters in *Lazarus Laughed*. Lazarus, as superman, spiritualizes and

2. O'Neill was aware that the authentic superman has nothing in common with the brutal conqueror of Nazi mythology, or the disembodied end-product of Shavian evolution, or the Dionysian pagan who gives free rein to his animal sensuality.

sublimates it. He triumphs over his animal passions through self-discipline and achieves the kind of happiness that accrues to those who are strong enough to perfect and master themselves. He has no desire to master others.

His wife Miriam, a "life-denying" Christian, extirpates the will-to-power. She resigns herself to sorrow and suffering, and she values life on earth only in so far as it is a preparation for life in the world to come. Lazarus affirms life; she negates it and longs for death. Lazarus, symbolically, dresses in white; Miriam dresses in black.

The Romans, Nazarenes, and orthodox Jews represent the generality of men. They do not try either to sublimate or to extirpate their desires; they try instead to overcome and dominate others. When they fail, they are themselves overcome by their own animality. Because they are afraid of death, they kill or threaten to kill their fellow men.

Thus the Nazarenes and orthodox Jews in Act I "raise clenched fists like threatening talons": they mutter and growl, and their "voices sound animal-like in anger." The Romans in Act IV huddle close to the ground like "terrified rats, their voices squeaky with fright," while Caligula, contemptuous alike of them and of himself, addresses them as his faithful scum and his brother swine.

Most men, O'Neill thought, are curs, dogs, roosters, pigs, swine, rats, jackals, and hyenas. Only a few have the strength to re-create themselves as supermen. Lazarus is able to do so, and to rise above the animal level, because (having experienced death) he understands two of the cardinal doctrines of Nietzsche's philosophy: *amor fati* and eternal recurrence.

Amor fati, or love of necessity, may be defined as the superman's attitude toward life and death. On the positive side it implies the joyful acceptance and affirmation of earthly life and of earthly suffering. On the negative side it implies the rejection of the Christian belief in personal immortality. "Remain true to earth," Zarathustra advises, "and believe not those who speak unto you of super-earthly hopes. . . . Ye want to be paid besides, ye virtuous ones? Ye want reward for your virtue?"³

"O Curious Greedy Ones," says Lazarus, "is not one world in which you know not how to live enough for you?"

"This life is thy eternal life," says Nietzsche.⁴

"Men must learn to live," says Lazarus.

And believing as he does that earthly life (becoming) is the only reality he can ever know, the superman deliberately immerses himself in it, affirms it, says Yes to it, and not only endures its pains and vicissitudes, but even welcomes them and rejoices in them. "My formula for

3. Thus Spoke Zarathustra, Prologue, 3, and II, 27.

4. *The Twilight of the Idols*, 1927, p. 22.

greatness in man," Nietzsche said, "is *amor fati*: That a man should wish to have nothing altered, either in the future, the past, or for all eternity. Not only must he endure necessity: . . . but he must also love it."⁵ *Lazarus Laughed* is the result of O'Neill's intellectual and emotional commitment to this philosophy.

Eternal recurrence, the second of the two doctrines mentioned above, meant one thing for Nietzsche and another for O'Neill. For Nietzsche it meant "the absolute and eternal cyclical repetition of all things":⁶ the hypothesis (to express the concept more simply) that all the events of history are destined to be re-enacted, precisely as they first occurred, in the same order and sequence, and not "once only, but again and again, through all eternity."⁷ For O'Neill, on the other hand, it meant (in *Lazarus Laughed* as in *The Fountain* and *The Great God Brown*) the cyclical regeneration of the biological abstraction Man. "Men pass! Like rain into the Sea!" Lazarus says. "Man remains! For Man death is not! Man, Son of God's Laughter, is!" Nietzsche deduced the doctrine from the premise that time and space are infinite—O'Neill, from the empirically observed repetition of the phenomena of birth and death.

O'Neill's conception of eternal recurrence is more primitive than Nietzsche's. It is analogous in some respects to the myths of cyclical birth and renewal—year-myths, for instance—by means of which archaic man tried to escape from the horrors of becoming and to maintain or establish a meaningful relationship with being. Myths of this kind, variously embedded in Indian and Greek systems of thought, were interpreted by Greek speculation in such a way as to lend the permanence of being to the evanescence of becoming.⁸ Nietzsche, according to Professor Kaufmann, thought that his nineteenth-century version of the doctrine, based on linear rather than on circular time, achieved the same result:

[Nietzsche] thought he had succeeded in creating a magnificent synthesis of the philosophies of Heraclitus and Parmenides, of the dynamic and the static world-pictures, of being and becoming: "That *all recurs* is the most extreme approach of a world of becoming to one of being." Nietzsche's doctrine would "impress upon becoming the character of being." In the moment it would find eternity.⁹

Pity, a Christian virtue, has no place in the superman's creed. Nietzsche denounces it on the ground that suffering is a necessary part of the

5. *Ecce Homo*, II, 10.

6. *Ibid.*, IV, 3.

7. *Die Frölichwissenschaft*. Cited by W. A. Kaufmann, *Nietzsche*, 1950, p. 285. Chapter 11, "Superman and Eternal Recurrence," in Professor Kaufmann's study provides an indispensable explanation of the interdependence, in Nietzsche's philosophy, of the doctrine of the superman and the doctrine of eternal recurrence.

8. Mircea Eliade, *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return*, 1959, p. 123. Professor Eliade's book, invaluable to the student of *Lazarus Laughed*, was first published in 1949 as *Le Mythe de l'Éternel Retour*. W. R. Trask's translation first appeared in 1954.

9. Kaufmann, *Nietzsche*, p. 288.

experience of the man who overcomes and perfects himself. Pity condones weakness. It involves a measure of condescension and even of contempt, and is therefore psychologically degrading to those who pity and to those who are pitied. Plato, Spinoza, and Kant are alike, Nietzsche observes, in their deprecation of pity.¹⁰

Lazarus represses his natural pity when his father and mother and two sisters are slain in a religious riot. Miriam is grief-stricken, but Lazarus cries "Yes! Yes!! Yes!!!" in a triumphant voice and laughs "from the depths of his exalted spirit." When his followers fall on their own swords, Lazarus's laugh is like "a triumphant, blood-stirring call to that ultimate attainment in which all prepossession with self is lost in an ecstatic affirmation of Life."

Miriam, meanwhile, a life-denying Christian who never laughs, is on her knees, a black figure of grief, "her arms raised outward like the arms of a cross." Caligula, the ape-man, hops up and down, watching for a sign of weakness in Lazarus and, when he thinks he has detected one, taunting him for giving way to pity. But Caligula is mistaken: far from pitying his followers, Lazarus exults in their "victory." They *will* to die, he tells Miriam. They *will* their own annihilation, they *will* to change. Change, he says, has been the rule of life ever since the first squirming specks, our primordial ancestors, crawled out of the sea. Death means change, and in willing to die, Lazarus's followers are synchronizing themselves with the rhythm of the universe. This thought intoxicates them and eliminates any urge they may have to preserve their own inconsequential lives and egos.

The casual reader of *Lazarus Laughed* may wonder why Miriam's longing for death is a denial of life, whereas the suicide of Lazarus's followers is an affirmation of life. The inconsistency, a real one, is the result of the fact that O'Neill uses the word "life" in two different ways. When he says that Christians deny life, he means that they undervalue their earthly, temporal existence. When he says that Lazarus's followers affirm life, he means that they accept the universe. Their laughter is the symbolical expression of their acceptance.

The paradox that suicide can be an affirmation of life is explicable in terms of the philosophy of Schopenhauer. Lazarus laughs when his followers are dying, not because he is a madman or a monster, but because he is a symbol of a concept borrowed by Nietzsche from Schopenhauer and incorporated in *The Birth of Tragedy*. The will-to-live is Schopenhauer's ultimate reality or thing-in-itself. Its manifestations or objectifications are the phenomena (including human beings) of the material universe. As such they are illusions, doomed (because each is competing with the others for existence) to fight with each other and to

10. Kaufmann, *Nietzsche*, p. 319.

destroy each other,—in a word, to suffer. When they die, they lose their individual identity and are merged in the eternal, formless reality of the will-to-live from which they sprang. It is in this sense that the self-annihilation of the individual can be called an assertion of life or of the will-to-live, and that the individual can achieve impersonal immortality. And it is in this sense that Lazarus uses the word "life" in his slogan "There is only life." He does not mean either life on earth or eternal life in the Christian sense of the term.

Nietzsche, in *The Birth of Tragedy*, re-interprets Schopenhauer's ideas in terms of the antithesis between man's Apollonian and Dionysian impulses. O'Neill tries to express them in *Lazarus Laughed* by means of the monosyllable "Yes," four or five ambiguous slogans, and Lazarus's mystical (and mystifying) laughter. He never quite succeeds in making his meaning clear.

Schopenhauer's philosophy is dualistic; Nietzsche's, subsequent to *The Birth of Tragedy*, is monistic. There are inconsistencies, therefore, between the parts of *Lazarus Laughed* that stem from *The Birth of Tragedy* and the parts that stem from *Thus Spake Zarathustra* and Nietzsche's later works. One of them is the inconsistency in the use of the word "life."

3

If Jesus had lived longer, Nietzsche maintained, He "would have learned to live, and love the earth—and laughter also! Believe it, my brethren! He died too early; He himself would have disavowed His doctrine had He attained my age."¹¹ But being immature, He had known only tears when He died, and so taught patience with what is "earthly," and even hatred of it, instead of joyful acceptance.

These remarks explain the significance of what happened when Lazarus first rose from the tomb. An eye-witness, one of the guests in the house of Lazarus's parents, describes the scene as follows:

Jesus looked into his face for what seemed a long time and suddenly Lazarus said "Yes" as if he were answering a question in Jesus' eyes. . . . Then Jesus smiled sadly but with tenderness, as one who from a distance of years of sorrow remembers happiness. And then Lazarus knelt and kissed Jesus' feet and both of them smiled and Jesus blessed him and called him "My Brother" and went away.

This little tableau is apt to convey the erroneous impression that Lazarus's doctrines are compatible, in O'Neill's opinion, with Christ's. It is clear, however, that it is Jesus who learns from Lazarus, and not Lazarus from Jesus, and that the substance of what he learns is contained in the word "Yes" and in the contrast that is drawn between sorrow and

11. *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, I, 21.

happiness. The implications are that He disavows His gospel of tears and authorizes Lazarus, by giving him His blessing, to preach the Nietzschean gospel of happiness. When He goes away, O'Neill is, in effect, dismissing Him and promoting Lazarus to the position of savior in His place.

O'Neill is much more critical of Jesus's disciples and followers¹² than of Jesus Himself. Mary, for instance,—Lazarus's sister,—turns Christianity into vindictive intolerance and *ressentiment*. Miriam, his wife, is meek and resigned. As a young woman she symbolizes eternal motherhood, but because she is a Christian she "denies life," grows rapidly older and older, and dies without having learned to live.

Lazarus grows rapidly younger and younger: he looks like a man of fifty in Act I and like a teen-age boy in Act IV. His naturalistic faith is, symbolically, the fountain of youth that Juan, in *The Fountain*, looks for in a material sense all his life. O'Neill may have been thinking, here, of an ancient version of the myth of eternal return, mentioned by Plato,¹³ in which the processes of growth are reversed and the old become young again. Their white hair becomes dark, their bearded cheeks become smooth, and their bodies become soft and small, until they look like newly born infants, and then they disappear altogether. This is what would have happened to Lazarus if he had not been burned at the stake—only, of course, instead of disappearing, he would have returned to some kind of symbolical womb.

A halo surrounds Lazarus's head; a mysterious light emanates from his body; his presence commands attention; he speaks as one having authority; his laughter is enough in itself to convert people to his creed. But after he leaves them, they relapse into their former condition of fear and mutual hatred. His ministry is a failure, for the "greatness of Saviors is that they may not save," and the "greatness of Man is that no god can save him—until he becomes a god." This paradox means that men must "create" themselves by sublimating their will-to-power and overcoming their limitations by their own unaided efforts. "Let it be my pride as Man," Lazarus says, "to re-create the God in me." But the generality of men are "despicable" and cannot transcend their animality. Lazarus himself scores a victory over death—the same sort of victory previously scored by his followers—but his achievement of martyrdom is futile. Caligula—half man and half beast—retains possession of the earth. "Men forget," Caligula observes as the final curtain falls.

Considered as tragic hero rather than as savior, Lazarus suffers from a curious and probably unique handicap: he has already fought the battle with himself that tragic heroes are customarily obliged to fight,

12. For an explanation of why Nietzsche calls them Nazarenes, see Kaufmann, *Nietzsche*, pp. 328–331.

13. *The Statesman*, 270. See Eliade, *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return*, 1959, pp. 120–121.

and he has already achieved inner peace and died. He is a static character, incapable of learning anything more by suffering than he has already learned. He endures harrowing external calamities, but the tides of inner conflict never sweep through him. The interest of the reader is sustained, therefore,—if it is sustained at all—more by curiosity concerning what O'Neill is trying to say than by pity and fear for the self-secure, self-honored Lazarus.

Lazarus is colorless as well as static. He has no personal traits of any distinctive kind; he is not, in fact, a recognizable human being. He is a symbol, an abstraction, a mere mouthpiece—and an inarticulate one at that—for O'Neill's ideas.

4

And so we are back at the point where we started. *The Great God Brown*, we suggested, is about Dion Anthony's reactions to an idea; it is not, strictly speaking, about the idea itself. The two halves of Dion's personality are pitted against each other in mortal combat, and the idea that divides and conquers him (and his successor Brown) is presented in the form of a dilemma. Dilemmas, having two horns, are the sort of stuff dramatic conflict is made of.

Lazarus Laughed, on the contrary, is a play about an idea rather than about a human being's reactions to an idea. Lazarus is an integrated, undivided character, and the idea he advocates is presented in the form of the undivided truth. Effective drama cannot be erected on such foundations. *Lazarus Laughed* is O'Neill's ugly didactic duckling; it is a tract in the guise of a play. Despite his own emotional involvement, and despite the masks, the crowds, the pageantry, the violence, and—yes—the importance of the subject, O'Neill did not succeed in transmuting his ideas into what the critics of the 1950's have become accustomed to calling viable drama.

CYRUS DAY

NOTES ON EUGENE O'NEILL IN JAPAN

ALTHOUGH translations of Eugene O'Neill's plays existed in Japan before 1924, none of his plays was performed on the Japanese stage until that year. It was through the Tsukiji Little Theater that the American playwright found a first hearing before a Japanese audience, and, between 1924 and 1929, six of his plays became part of the Tsukiji repertoire. The first Japanese production of any O'Neill play, *Beyond the Horizon*, took place in October, 1924. *The Emperor Jones* followed in March, 1925; *The Long Voyage Home* and *Before Breakfast* in February, 1927; *Ile* in February and again in May, 1927; and *The Hairy Ape* in May, 1929.

The Tsukiji, established in 1924, was supported by a group of theater enthusiasts who represented the progressive intelligentsia in Japan and were dissatisfied with the existing conventional and commercial theater. Their aim was to encourage the production of an advanced drama worthy of the new generation, to make possible experiments in the arts of the theater, and to create for the public a permanent stage where "edifying" plays would be offered in repertory system. The Tsukiji theater was actually founded by Osanai Kaoru, poet, novelist, playwright, and scholar of the theater arts, and Tsuchikata Yoshi, actor and Osanai's young disciple. Osanai, an ardent student of Craig, had fifteen years earlier created the Ziyu Gekijo, a "free" theater devoted primarily to the realistic and naturalistic European drama. Now, under the influence of Stanislavsky and Reinhardt, whose productions he attended in Europe, he created the Tsukiji to give expression to a new theater which would ultimately stimulate Japanese playwriting and pave the way for a modern Japanese theater, free from the deep-rooted conventions and practices of the Kabuki. It is not surprising that Osanai and Tsuchikata found strong opposition to their ideas and their kind of theater; many doubted the validity of producing western drama in translation on the Japanese stage. During the period from June, 1924, to April, 1929, the Tsukiji included in its list of plays Shakespeare, all the important European playwrights from Ibsen to Chekhov, some contemporary writers such as Capek and Kaiser, modern Japanese drama, and American drama (mainly O'Neill).

Of the six plays by O'Neill produced at the Tsukiji, *The Hairy Ape* was probably the most important one. This may be gathered from a symposium by various members of the Tsukiji group written before the actual production of the play but published shortly afterwards in Vol-

ume IV of *Drama and Criticism* (June, 1927, pp. 88-96). Shimada Keiichi hoped that the staging of *The Hairy Ape* would have some positive effect on the Tsukiji actors who, he feared, were gradually losing their imagination and creativeness. He also felt that this play would reflect poignantly the emotions and the mental attitude of the middle-class intelligentsia, direct its attention to the social crisis, and point up the disintegration of the social structure based on a bourgeois culture. Thus Mr. Shimada interpreted the play in terms of social problems; he regarded "the barbarism of Yank as the product of the imminent social problems." He viewed O'Neill's fascination with abstraction and mysticism, with "loneliness and desolation," as a sign of weakness and expressed the belief that a "reactionary pessimism" should not be allowed to interfere with the social message of the play.

Mr. Shimada, who played the part of Yank, "the member of the fifth class," on the Tsukiji stage, indicated that he would try to bring out the comic elements of the play through Yank's unawareness of the cultural and social crisis and to inject humor into the self-centered action of the stoker, while at the same time being "fully aware of the propaganda value of this play on the stage." Takahashi Ikutaro, in planning the performance of *The Hairy Ape*, wanted to treat Yank as a man who becomes helplessly lost because he finds it impossible to become an organic part of an organized group. He intended to show how miserably "unorganized violence" can fail. He, like Shimada, stressed heavily the social implications of the play, even found socialistic elements in it, and gave a rather free and highly subjective interpretation of the American author's original intentions.

In discussing O'Neill's expressionism, Kitamura Kihachi, drama critic, playwright, and another one of Osanai's disciples, argued that Yank is neither an archetype nor an abstraction in the typical manner of expressionism. *The Hairy Ape* is regarded primarily as a social play, and Yank is seen to symbolize "a certain class, a certain life, and a certain fate." Finally, Kitamura Komatsu, known for his translations of O'Neill's plays, commented on the dialogue and the stage setting of *The Hairy Ape* and maintained that the many slang expressions and the profane language "are transformed, by the magic touch of O'Neill's pen, into shining literary expressions" and add a charm of their own to the play.

One month later, Kitamura Komatsu published, in the second volume of *Engeki Shincho* (July, 1927, pp. 68-70), his generally favorable impressions of the performance. He praised the stage setting, particularly of the various parts of the ship, which was based on the design of Tairov's Karmerny Theater production in Moscow, and said that one felt the movement of the ship as if the theater itself was moving. The Fifth Avenue scene seemed less successful, in design as well as in acting, and

Mr. Kitamura found that Mr. Shimada as Yank did not possess the physical characteristics necessary to portray convincingly the big and brawny stoker.

Of more recent O'Neill productions, information is available only of performances of *The Great God Brown* in May, 1928, and of *Bound East for Cardiff* in March, 1931, both at the Kindai Theater of Tokyo, and another professional production of *Ah, Wilderness!* (in the translation of Kitamura Kihachi), first staged by the Haiyu Za in the Mitsukoshi Theater of Tokyo in 1948 and running for twenty-seven performances. Various student organizations in Tokyo performed *Bound East for Cardiff* and *Ile* in November, 1947, and *Ile* in November, 1949.

An interesting highlight is thrown on the popularity of certain O'Neill plays in Japan by the data available on the translations of individual plays. The years between 1923 and 1953 saw the publication of twenty-two of O'Neill's dramas in Japanese. Of these, seven plays appeared in three different translations: *Beyond the Horizon* (1923, 1928, and 1952); *Thirst* (1923, 1926, and 1931); *The Hairy Ape* (1926/27, 1928, and 1953); *Desire Under the Elms* (1927, 1930, and 1935); and *Anna Christie* (1927, 1928, and 1951).

Only three plays of O'Neill's were translated twice: *Bound East for Cardiff* (1929; a second version was published, probably in 1930, by the Kenkyusha publishing house); *The Moon of the Caribbees* (1929 and 1931); and *Strange Interlude* (in 1929, translated by Hitaka Noboru and ten years later by Inoue Soji and Ishida Eiji). Eleven plays—that is, half of all those published in Japanese—were translated only once: *The Long Voyage Home* (1924); *The Rope* (1925); *Before Breakfast* (1925); *The Web* (1926); *The Straw* (1927); *Ile* and *The Great God Brown* (1928); *The Fog* (1930); *Dynamo* (1931); *Days Without End* (1938); and *Warning* (1941).

The trilogy, *Mourning Becomes Electra*, seems to take a special place among O'Neill's plays in Japan. It was also translated three times, but published more times than any of the other plays. The first translation was done by Hayashi Kenjiro in 1932, the second (1937) by Sakakura Tokutaka in collaboration with three other translators. In 1940 Seino Choichiro's version of the trilogy was published by the Kobundo publishing house, and the same translation was re-issued in 1952 under the imprint of Iwanami Shoten in Tokyo. This publishing house also brought out two of O'Neill's plays in the late thirties and five plays between 1951 and 1953.

During the twenties, the major translator was Kitamura Kihachi, who was responsible for the Japanese version of *The Long Voyage Home* and *Where the Cross Is Made* and a collection of six plays, published in 1928

by Kindaisha in Tokyo. In the late thirties and the early fifties, the principal translators were Seino Choichiro, Ishida Eiji, and Inoue Soji.

It is indicative of the importance of O'Neill as a literary figure in Japan that three book-length studies of his life and works have been published in that country. The first one by Seino Choichiro, *Eugene O'Neill* (Tokyo: Kenkyusha, 1935, 191 pp.), was intended to introduce the American playwright to Japanese readers. It gives a detailed chronology of O'Neill's life and a concise analysis of eleven of his plays. O'Neill had been asked to suggest nine of his plays for the discussion, and Seino selected *Beyond the Horizon* and *Anna Christie* as the two additional plays. The critic-translator used the available American critical writing as a basis for his interpretations, and, while the study is not particularly original, it is filled with admiration for the American dramatist and with appreciation for his works. He admired especially O'Neill's unusually fast development from an objective writer of sea plays to a biographical realist and finally to a philosophical and subjective symbolist. "To achieve this kind of rapid progress," Mr. Seino maintained, "most writers may have to live an entire life, but O'Neill did it in less than twenty years." Excellent summaries of the dramatic plots, extensive quotations from the text (in Japanese), photographs from O'Neill's life, and reproductions of stage settings from American productions enhance the value of this study, which is dedicated "to Mr. and Mrs. Eugene O'Neill as a token of friendship and in gratitude for valuable assistance in the production of this book."

O'Neill and His Works by Nakajima Tadatashi (Tokyo: Medical Friend Sha, 1952, 172 pp.) is a highly subjective study which arbitrarily selects certain plays by the American dramatist in order to trace and to clarify his ideas. It is written, according to the foreword, in protest to those critics who asserted that O'Neill had no philosophy or that he was never certain of his own ideas. The Japanese critic maintains that after reading an O'Neill play we are left with the impression that the American playwright is in close pursuit of the inner and most truthful nature of humanity and that, however varied and individualized the characters of his plays may be, "we are always and consistently left with an image of Man." This constant search for the meaning of life and the nature of reality is considered one of the major characteristics of O'Neill, whose "creative imagination is identified with the spirit of infinity."

The most comprehensive and the most scholarly of the three studies is *Eugene O'Neill* by Kimura Toshio (Osaka: Akari Shobo, 1953, 248 pp.) Here the Japanese critic gives sharp and objective evaluations of almost all of O'Neill's plays including *The Iceman Cometh*, *A Moon for the Misbegotten*, as well as the early "lost" plays. He views the work of the

American playwright as theater as well as literature, making sane judgments and frequently raising pertinent questions. The study ends with the comment: "He tried to write tragedy in this tragically confused world of our times, and this will have to be taken into consideration when we judge the quality of his dramatic work." Mr. Kimura thinks that man himself, the question of his "belonging," and what is behind life are the centers of O'Neill's interest and concern, and not the relation between man and man or between man and society. In general, he envisages his book as an aid to the future study of O'Neill in Japan. His extensive bibliography of American and Japanese criticism of O'Neill's work and his list of plays and translations are indicative of Mr. Kimura's thorough scholarship.

A substantial body of critical writing on Eugene O'Neill appeared in primarily academic periodicals in the decade from 1948 to 1958. Most of the essays published in Japan up to 1947 were either factual accounts of his life (e.g., Nishimura Shizuhiko, "Nobel Prize Honors O'Neill, America's Shakespeare," *Yuben*, XXVIII [April, 1937], 240-248), plot summaries, or derivative interpretations of the playwright's ideas and techniques (e.g., Yamamoto Shyuji, "The Drama of American Expressionism," *Engeki Shincho*, II [February, 1927], 11-14). However, there were some attempts at original evaluations. For example, in a series of four articles entitled "Eugene O'Neill and Paganism" in the *Ei Bungaku Kenkyu* of 1942-1943 Nakano Yoshio discussed O'Neill's paganism as "the revolt and the revenge of the unjustly oppressed life against the wrong moral code of Puritanism" and traced the American playwright's mysticism as opposed to American materialism through some of O'Neill's major works.

Informative material on Eugene O'Neill continued to be published in the periodicals after 1947, but now critical evaluation became more frequent. In an extensive essay, entitled "A Study of Eugene O'Neill," printed in the Tokyo School of Economics publication *Keidaigaku Kaishi* (September, 1954, pp. 96-128), Shozui Sengichi gave a detailed account of O'Neill's emergence as an American playwright, called the quality of his plays "uneven," but maintained that even in plays generally regarded as failures, he was successful in creating dramatic tension. Then he discussed the change from naturalism to expressionism in O'Neill's plays and compared *Desire Under the Elms*, in which O'Neill's frequent protests against Christian Puritanism are especially intense, with Tolstoy's *The Power of Darkness*. In O'Neill's depiction of the helplessness of humanity Mr. Shozui discovered the blind and relentless force of fate and the influence of Greek tragedy. In the very long O'Neill plays, he saw elements of the novel and at times even epic qualities. But

he found the portrayal of uneducated and uncultured characters unsatisfactory in that their speech is too logical and too precise.

In *The Iceman Cometh*, Mr. Shozui found that O'Neill returns to the keynote of pessimism, from which he had departed in *Ah, Wilderness!* and *Lazarus Laughed*, and rejects every convenient faith and every cheap salvation. The essay ends with the curious remark that O'Neill and Synge are the greatest playwrights which the twentieth century has so far produced.

In a brief article in the third volume of *Eigo Seinen* (March 1, 1954, pp. 100-101), the translator-critic Inoue Soji asserted that, although it is possible to evaluate O'Neill's works in terms of pessimism, romantic idealism, realism, and even nihilism, the American playwright is before all else concerned with giving appropriate form to the turbulent inner conflicts of the human soul. Mr. Inoue wrote another somewhat larger and more critical essay on *The Iceman Cometh* in Volume IV of the *Bulletin of the Liberal Arts College* of Wakayama University (March, 1954, pp. 74-82). In interpreting this play which, in his opinion, sums up O'Neill's view of life, Mr. Inoue suggests that Larry, "the philosopher" and the most interesting character in the play, reminds one of O'Neill. Does not, Mr. Inoue asks, "O'Neill himself, like Larry in the play, contentedly assume the position of a grandstand philosopher, if with some feeling of self-mockery?" And, if Larry sits, philosophizes, and mocks at himself, where does O'Neill, who shares the character traits with Larry, seek the spiritual support for his existence? The answer is that O'Neill has found support in his creative work. The article concludes with a comparison of this play with Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, which has attracted much attention from the Japanese public. By using a similar theme of dreams, reality, and death, and depicting the same feeling of loneliness in a salesman's life, Miller has created an "American tragedy" against the background of the social and economic structure of American capitalism, while O'Neill has presented "a universal tragedy of man" in a play which showed a penetrating and intuitive understanding of human nature. O'Neill's constant preoccupation with the agony of the human soul and his divorce from the practical problems of the society are given as reasons why people are gradually moving away from O'Neill. He has, according to the Japanese critic, become a "superannuated playwright."

Mr. Inoue had expressed similar ideas about *The Iceman Cometh* two months earlier in *Tosho* (No. 52, January, 1954, pp. 4-7). This play sums up O'Neill's philosophy of life—his last years particularly were characterized by disillusionment, despair, and indifference to reality. Especially interesting is the suggestion that *The Iceman Cometh* may occupy the same place within O'Neill's total work that *The Tempest*

occupies in Shakespeare's plays. The idea of Larry representing O'Neill's views and attitudes toward life was again repeated in an article by Hukuda Shozo in *Studies and Essays by the Faculty of Law and Literature* at Kanazawa University (No. 5, January, 1958, pp. 130-136). Larry's pessimism and nihilism reminded Mr. Hukuda of O'Neill's statement that America, in trying to gain the world, lost its own soul.

Seino Choichiro has written two notes in *Eigo Seinen* on O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey Into Night* and its publication and production in Stockholm and New York (August 1, 1957, p. 398) and on "Attitude of O'Neill as a Dramaturge" (March 1, 1958, pp. 118-119). Mr. Seino praises *Long Day's Journey Into Night* but finds *A Touch of the Poet* "a regrettably poor play"; he shows that all along O'Neill's development is uneven and that the forms of his plays vary widely. He pays special attention to O'Neill's use and theory of the masks, a subject which was treated more fully in an interesting article, entitled "Changes in the Use of the Mask—The Case of O'Neill and Hawthorne" and published in Volume II of *Eibei Bungaku* (April, 1957, pp. 1-10). In this comparative study, Hamada Seijiro discussed the different and predominantly external use of the mask in such plays as *The Great God Brown*, *Lazarus Laughed*, and *Days Without End* and maintained that, in contrast to Hawthorne, O'Neill never fully and consistently realized the significance of the mask.

Long Day's Journey Into Night and the whole question of optimism and pessimism in O'Neill's plays were discussed in two articles in the Research Bulletin of Nagoya University, *Kiyo* (No. 1, March, 1957, pp. 51-63, and No. 2, December, 1957, pp. 63-78). Muramatsu Masashi suggests the mystic exaltation, which Edmund in *Long Day's Journey Into Night* experienced during the moment of his communion with the Absolute Being, and the feeling of loneliness, which overtakes him immediately afterwards, as the two basic, alternating experiences of O'Neill which frequently recur in his plays. The Japanese critic shows how O'Neill's main theme develops out of the despair and disillusionment of life into the positive belief in the eternal immanence of life and, in his later works, vacillates between an optimistic pagan-mysticism, in which the reality of death is negated, and his projections of pessimism "which lurks in one deep corner of his heart." He, like so many of his fellow critics, observes O'Neill's deep interest in man's mystical "behind life" and in the inner conflict of the human soul which takes place whenever obstacles prevent the life energy from realizing itself.

An interesting essay treating the symbol of the "whitened sepulchre" in four of O'Neill's plays appeared in *Jimbungaku* (No. 18, February, 1955, pp. 61-73). Kimura Toshio discusses Mildred's white dress and the white-painted steel cage in *The Hairy Ape*, the white portico of the

Mannon home, Brutus Jones' "white Yankee" mentality and his worship of and obsession with white, and the dual (and ironic) meaning of the color white in *All God's Chillun Got Wings*. His concern with O'Neill's use of masks leads Mr. Kimura to stress, as many other Japanese critics had done before him, O'Neill's persisting quest into what lies "behind life." The same critic devoted another eighteen-page essay, entitled "'Mother' in Eugene O'Neill's Works" (apparently a reprint from the magazine *Jimbungaku*, c. 1954), to an interpretation of the mother image as conveyed by O'Neill. Mr. Kimura appraises the nostalgic feeling toward mother and the love of mother in many of O'Neill's plays as a negative and destructive force. It is the mother who brings about the separation of man from nature, a state which causes human misery and unhappiness. Mr. Kimura wonders if O'Neill is trying to solve man's dilemma by having him return to the mother rather than by having him progress to maturity. At least, that would explain why so many characters in O'Neill's plays are abnormal, morbid, anti-social and end their lives unhappily as adolescents. These two essays as well as his book-length study establish Kimura Toshio without question as the most original and most important contemporary critic of O'Neill's works.

In general, one may conclude that the Japanese critics were greatly interested in Eugene O'Neill not merely as a dramatist but also as a man—in his early life of romantic adventure and wandering, in his modest beginning as a playwright in a small fishing town, in his fervor and sincerity as an experimenter in the most varied forms of dramatic expression, and ultimately in his confession of pessimism and nihilism as expressed in many of his plays. In O'Neill the critics discovered a man consciously articulating his views of life and death, a man of mystic quality whose preoccupation was with the nature of "behind life." They favored such plays as *The Hairy Ape* and *The Iceman Cometh*, for they saw in them the expression of the playwright's disillusionment with modern civilization and his opposition to American and western materialism. If they failed to find a more articulated social message in his works, they sympathized with the playwright's sense of desolation as, for example, may be seen in the unformulated and unchanneled "violence" of Yank in *The Hairy Ape*, and even shared O'Neill's suffering as dramatized in terms of despair and resignation in such a play as *The Iceman Cometh*.

HORST FRENZ

(Translations by TAI YUL KIM)

DIALOGUE IN THE PLAYS OF EUGENE O'NEILL

"WHEN ye kin make corn sprout out o' stones, God's livin' in yew!" says flinty old Ephraim Cabot, the father in *Desire Under the Elms* (1924). Nina in the nine-act trilogy, *Strange Interlude* (1926, 1927) says, "Strange Interlude! Yes, our lives are merely strange dark interludes in the electric display of God the Father!" These two quotations might be taken as samples of the difference between O'Neill's natural idiomatic dialogue of the early plays and the grandiose rhetoric that became habitual in the later ones. Ephraim Cabot's line comes out of his own experience and belongs to him, whereas Nina is only the mouthpiece of the playwright.

It is ironic that perhaps Eugene O'Neill's greatest tragedy was his own inability to assess his real talent and his limitations. When his aims were modest, he achieved his best work. When he exceeded himself, he resorted to self-defense such as this:

But where I feel myself most neglected is just where I set most store by myself—as a bit of a poet, who has labored with the spoken word to evolve original rhythms of beauty where beauty apparently isn't—*Jones, Ape, God's Chillun, Desire*, etc.—and to see the transfiguring nobility of tragedy, in as near the Greek sense as one can grasp it, in seemingly the most confirmed mystic, too, for I'm always, always, trying to interpret Life in terms of lives, never just lives in terms of character.¹

O'Neill's work has been called "the most Cyclopean dramatic enterprise in the English language"² though some of it will appal the discriminating reader who first meets it on the printed page. O'Neill was inspired by the poetic spirit which was often obscured by excesses of one kind or another.

Perhaps O'Neill was a victim of his own spectacular success. From 1916 when the Provincetown Players produced *Bound East for Cardiff* until 1946 with the production of *The Iceman Cometh*, he was never entirely neglected. A three-time winner of the Pulitzer Prize, in 1920, 1922, and 1928, he received in 1936 the Nobel Prize for literature. His greatness lies in his many-sidedness: the dramatist; the technician and innovator; the philosopher and mystic; the Freudian and the reader in science; the symbolist; the revolutionary in themes and subjects; the

1. A. H. Quinn, *A History of the American Drama from the Civil War to the Present Day* (New York, 1927), II:199. Reprinted in Sophus Keith Winther, *Eugene O'Neill: A Critical Study* (New York, 1934), pp. 219-220.

2. John Gassner, *A Treasury of the Theatre from Henrik Ibsen to Eugene Ionesco*, Third Col lege Edition (New York, 1960), p. 788.

critic of the social order. A dramatist prodigal of his talents, he was a man who was too impatient or too lacking in self-criticism to care about discriminating detail, too undisciplined in the exacting work of finding the right phrase, the precise idiom.

A study of O'Neill's plays raises a number of questions about his dialogue, his use of the spoken word to delineate character, to fill in the necessary background, to suggest the true quality of dramatic moments. Although he professes to have "labored with the spoken word to evolve original rhythms of beauty," he often has failed to allow characters to speak for themselves, has obtruded his own feelings and thoughts, and has allowed himself to repeat over and again certain general speech habits that have little relation to natural speech. One might consider two phases of his dialogue, the natural, in which he seemed to turn his inner ear to the speech of his characters, and the literary, or rhetorical, in which he spoke, in often rather fulsome extravagance, for the characters he created.

The S.S. *Glencairn* one-act plays are still among the most distinguished of American short plays. His first produced play, for example, *Bound East for Cardiff* (1916), suggests the sorry life of a motley crew, briefly sketches the story of real friendship between two homeless seamen, and portrays the last moments in the life of Yank, bravely trying to face death. O'Neill, writing without affectation, suggests the authentic speech of several different nationals. In a second example, *The Long Voyage Home* (1919), he characterizes in a few lines a low dive on the London waterfront, the gross proprietor and his stooges, seamen from the S.S. *Glencairn*, and particularly the unfortunate Olson. The dialogue suggests speech such as he might have heard:

JOE. I ain't speakin' on'y fur meself. Down't I always give ye yer share, fair and square, as man to man?

NICK (*with a sneer*). Yus—b'cause you 'as to.

JOE. 'As to? Listen to 'im! There's many'd be 'appy to 'ave your berth, me man!

NICK. Yus? Wot wiv the peelers li'ble to put me away in the bloody jail fur crimpin', an' all?

JOE (*indignantly*). We down't do no crimpin'.

NICK (*sarcastically*). Ho, now! Not 'arf!

JOE (*a bit embarrassed*). Well, on'y a bit now an' agen when there ain't no reg'lar trade. (*To hide his confusion he turns to the barmaid angrily. She is still mopping off the bar, her chin on her breast, half-asleep.*) 'ere, me gel, we've 'ad enough o' that. You been a-moppin', an' a-moppin' an' a-moppin' the blarsted bar fur a 'ole 'our. 'op it aht o' this! You'd fair guv a bloke the shakes a-watchin' yer.

MAG (*beginning to sniffle*). Ow, you do frighten me when you

'oller at me, Joe. I ain't a bad gel, I ain't. Gawd knows I tries to do me best fur you. (*She bursts into a tempest of sobs.*)

JOE (*roughly*). Stop yer grizzlin'! An' 'op it aht of 'ere!

NICK (*chuckling*). She's drunk, Joe. Been 'ittin' the gin, eh, Mag?

MAG (*ceases crying at once and turns on him furiously*). You little crab, you! Orter wear a muzzle, you ort! A-openin' of your ugly mouth to a honest woman what ain't never done you no 'arm. (*commencing to sob again*) H'abusin' me like a dawg cos I'm sick an' orf me oats, an' all.

In another early play, *Desire Under the Elms* (1924), O'Neill has written a clipped and credible New England speech, one which is in harmony with the characters of the play. In that crucial scene in which Abbie learns how her own words have ruined her, words casually spoken to the old man she married before she came to love Eben, a scene which telescopes the whole range of feeling she has had for Eben, O'Neill wrote some of his best dialogue. Eben's love for Abbie turned to hate when he learned she had made use of him for her own advantage, unaware that her love for him has become the most compelling part of her life:

EBEN (*scrambling to his feet and following her—accusingly*). Ye're nothin' but a stinkin' passel o' lies! Ye've been lyin' t' me every word ye spoke, day and night, since we fust—done it. Ye've kept sayin' ye loved me . . .

ABBIE (*frantically*). I do love ye! (*She takes his hand but he flings hers away.*)

EBEN (*unheeding*). Ye've made a fool o' me—a sick, dumb fool—a-purpose! Ye've been on'y playin' yer sneakin', stealin' game all along—gittin' me t' lie with ye so's ye'd have a son he'd think was his'n, an' makin' him promise he'd give ye the farm and let me eat dust, if ye did git him a son! (*Staring at her with anguished, bewildered eyes*) They must be a devil livin' in ye! T'ain't human t' be as bad as that be!

ABBIE (*stunned—dully*). He told yew . . . ?

EBEN. Hain't it true? It hain't no good in yew lyin'.

ABBIE (*pleadingly*). Eben, listen—ye must listen—it was long ago—afore we done nothin'—yew was scornin' me—goin' t' see Min—when I was lovin' ye—an' I said it t' him t' git vengeance on ye!

EBEN (*unheedingly. With tortured passion*). I wish ye was dead! I wish I was dead along with ye afore this come! (*Ragingly*) But I'll git my vengeance too! I'll pray Maw t' come back t' help me—t' put her cuss on yew an him!

ABBIE (*brokenly*). Don't ye, Eben! Don't ye! (*She throws herself on her knees before him, weeping.*) I didn't mean t' do bad t' ye! Fergive me, won't ye?

EBEN (*not seeming to hear her—fiercely*). I'll git squar' with the old skunk—an' yew! I'll tell him the truth 'bout the son he's so

proud o'! Then I'll go t' the gold fields o' California whar Sim and Peter be!

ABBIE (*terrified*). Ye won't—leave me? Ye can't!

EBEN (*with fierce determination*). I'm a-goin', I tell ye! I'll git rich thar an' come back an' fight him fur the farm he stole—an' I'll kick ye both out in the road—t' beg an' sleep in the woods—an' yer son along with ye—t' starve an' die! (*He is hysterical at the end.*)

Abbie, frantic an determined to prove to Eben that her love for him has become as real as he thought it originally, makes the desperate promise which, when fulfilled, destroys both of them. The dialogue is emotionally high-keyed, brief and half-articulated, and in the idiom of the characters who speak.

ABBIE. An' ye're truly goin' West—goin' t' leave me—all account o' him bein' born?

EBEN. I'm goin' in the mornin'—or may God strike me t' hell!

ABBIE (*after a pause—with a dreadful cold intensity—slowly*). If that's what his comin's done t' me—killin' yewr love—takin' yew away—the on'y joy I ever knowed—like heaven t' me—purtier'n heaven—then I hate him, even if I be his Maw!

EBEN (*bitterly*). Lies! Ye love him! He'll steal the farm fur ye! (*Brokenly*) But t'ain't the farm so much—not no more—it's yew foolin' me—gittin' me t' love ye—lyin' yew loved me—jest t' git a son t' steal!

ABBIE (*distractedly*). He won't steal! I'd kill him fust! I do love ye! I'll prove t' ye . . . !

O'Neill, in his attempts to broaden the possibilities of the theater, quite early left the realistic manner for the expressionist. Two favorites of the anthologists, *The Emperor Jones* (1920) and *The Hairy Ape* (1921), both plays in eight scenes depicting the retrogressive position of the main character, both imaginatively framed in scenes of pictorial contrast, show the originality of O'Neill's mind and his talent for creating unusual imagery in theatrical terms. The characters are not individuals but symbols, the action evolves not from life but from ideas, and the speech is secondary to the very striking pantomime, and to the highly emotive sound effects which are part of every production.

O'Neill, concerned with the essentially racial heritage of his Emperor Jones, forgot or ignored the distinctive idiom and speech of the Negro, his natural and so often very fresh use of imagery. He resorted to certain literary conventions of uneducated speech, such as dropped consonants, substitution of d's for th's, and typical errors in usage. For instance, an early speech to ferret-eyed Smithers:

"... No use'n you rakin' up ole times. What I was den is one thing. What I is now's another. You didn't let me in on yo' crooked work out o' no kind feelin's dat time. I done de dirty work fo' you—and

most o' de brain work, too, fo' dat matter—and I was wu'th money to you, dat's de reason."

In the ironic bragging speech before he takes to the woods Jones anticipates many of the harangues which keep reappearing in later plays:

"Look-a-heah, white man! Does you think I'se a natural bo'n fool? Give me credit fo' havin' some sense, fo' Lawd's sake! Don't you s'pose I'se looked ahead and made sho' of all de chances? I'se gone out in dat big forest, pretendin' to hunt, so many times dat I knows it high and low like a book. I could go through on dem trails with my eyes shut (*with great contempt*). . . ."

In the remaining eight scenes Jones continues a monologue that expresses O'Neill's theory about the social position of the Negro rather than suggesting the speech of the character. Even an expressionist play about a Negro would profit from the kind of dialogue found in Roark Bradford's *Of Man Adam and His Chillun*, basis for Marc Connelly's *Green Pastures*, or Du Bose Heyward's *Porgy* upon which the opera was based, or in the Paul Green play, *In Abraham's Bosom*.

There is also poetic conception in the setting of *The Hairy Ape* where the image of "the steel framework of a cage" is repeated. The heart of the drama lies in the clash of ideas symbolized in the characters. The hairy-chested Neanderthal men representing all the "civilized white races" cramped in the dungeon of the ship are contrasted in their brute vitality with Mildred and her Aunt, bloodless figures from the privileged classes, and later with the marionette caricatures on Fifth Avenue. The dialogue is again quite secondary.

Yank, representing the most articulate of his mates, is given to exceedingly long tirades about his place, his fury over Mildred's insults, and his seeking "to belong." The dialogue is somewhat reminiscent of Jones, with additional touches of Brooklynese—"foist"—"boids"—"woild." Most of his speeches ring with social protest more appropriate to O'Neill than to "The Thinker."

"De Bible, huh? De Cap'tlist class, huh? Aw nix on dat Salvation Army-Socialist bull. Git a soapbox! Hire a hall! Come and be saved, huh? Jerk us to Jesus, huh? Aw, g'wan! I've listened to lots of guys like you, see. Yuh're all wrong. Wanter know what I t'ink? Yuh ain't no good for no one. Yuh're de bunk. Yuh ain't got de noive, get me? Yuh're yellow, dat's what. Yellow, dat's you. Say! What's dem slobs in de foist cabin got to do wit us? We're better men dan dey are, ain't we? Sure! One of us guys could clean up de whole mob wit one mit. . . ."

Speeches like this make good theater because of their vitality and strength but are not particularly noteworthy as dramatic literature.

O'Neill obviously worked for speech rhythms to distinguish Paddy's speech from Yank's but the idiom seems to be conventional literary Irish:

"... Oh, the clean skins of them, and the clear eyes, the straight backs and full chests of them! Brave men they was, and bold men surely! We'd be sailing out, bound down round the Horn maybe. We'd be making sail in the dawn, with a fair breeze, singing a chanty song wid no care to it. ..."

The dialogue of John Millington Synge and Sean O'Casey, each so different, but so close to the idiom of an imaginative and voluble people, has made lines like those given to Paddy seem almost as hackneyed as the old Pat and Mike routine.

Two other examples from *The Hairy Ape* indicate how theatrical device has overshadowed the dialogue. In scene four when Yank, smouldering over the recent insults and trying to understand the significance, verbalizes extensively, he is interrupted by the monosyllabic chorus of his mates—Think!—Love!—Law!—Government!—God! The tinny mechanical quality of these utterances would be more theatrically effective than significant in meaning. The puppet figures on Fifth Avenue, Frankenstein monsters in their detached, mechanical unawareness, can be striking, but again it is the pantomime that communicates the contrast. And again, their acid remarks belong more nearly to O'Neill than to men in Prince Alberts, high hats, and spats:

"Dear Doctor Caiaphas! He is so sincere!

What was the sermon? I dozed off.

About the radicals, my dear—and the false doctrines that are being preached.

We must organize a hundred per cent American bazaar.

And let everyone contribute one-hundredth per cent of their income tax. ..."

Perhaps *The Great God Brown* (1925) best illustrates the great gap between O'Neill's aim and achievement in terms of his ability to write poetic speech and to create character of high tragic significance. He analyzed the complexity of Dion:

Dion's mask of Pan which he puts on as a boy is not only a defense against the world for the super-sensitive painter-poet underneath it, but also an integral part of his character as the artist. The world is not only blind to the man beneath, but it also sneers at and condemns the Pan-mask it sees. After that Dion's inner self retrogresses along the line of Christian resignation until it partakes of the nature of the Saint while at the same time the outer Pan is slowly transformed by his struggle with reality into Mephistopheles. It is as Mephistopheles he falls stricken at Brown's feet after having condemned Brown to destruction by willing him his mask, but, this mask falling off as he dies, it is the Saint who kisses Brown's feet in prayer.³

Dion Anthony (Dionysus and St. Anthony) is one of O'Neill's poets for

3. Barrett H. Clark, *Eugene O'Neill: The Man and His Plays*, Revised Edition (New York 1936), p. 161.

whom a heightened, extremely subtle and connotative speech is essential. And yet Dion's account of a traumatic childhood experience is typical of a kind of garrulousness that became habitual with the playwright when he began to depend on overstatement:

"Listen! One day when I was four years old, a boy sneaked up behind when I was drawing a picture in the sand he couldn't draw and hit me on the head with a stick and kicked out my picture and laughed when I cried. It wasn't what he'd done that made me cry, but him. I had loved and trusted him and suddenly the good God was disproved in his person and the evil and injustice of Man was born! Everyone called me cry-baby, so I became silent for life and designed a mask of the Bad Boy Pan in which to live and rebel against that other boy's God and protect myself from his cruelty. And that other boy, secretly he felt ashamed but he couldn't acknowledge it; so from that day he instinctively developed into the good boy, the good friend, the good man, William Brown!"

These lines give the impression that O'Neill is speaking of his own childhood, protesting against a world unkind to poets. Dion is only a mouth-piece. The flamboyance of the language here is like so much of O'Neill's romantic rebellion against the materialistic world placed in the mouths of his protagonists.

Strange Interlude (1926, 1927), a trilogy in nine acts that covers rather extensively the relationships and crises of four characters during twenty-seven or more years, and which makes use of the old convention of the aside and the soliloquy, is, in spite of the unconventional form, a return to realism like that of Strindberg and his concern with discovering motives. The play, another attempt to overcome the limitations of the stage, suffers from length and wordiness. Four comments might be made about the dialogue, relative to the value of the spoken thoughts: the bulky handling of certain expository material, the intrusion of certain philosophical speeches, and the quality of dialogue in crucial scenes.

An excerpt from a scene early in the play in which Marsden, an old family friend, and Professor Leeds greet Nina, raises questions of what is added by the thinking out loud, and whether some of these lines could not have been spoken naturally:

MARSDEN (*troubled—thinking*).

She has changed . . . what has happened? . . .

(*He comes forward to her—a bit embarrassed but affectionately using her pet name for her.*)

Hello, Nina Cara Nina! Are you trying to cut me dead, young lady?

NINA (*turning her eyes to Marsden, holding out her hand for him to shake, in her cool preoccupied voice*).

Hello, Charlie. (*Her eyes immediately return to her father.*)

Listen, Father!

MARSDEN (*standing near her, concealing his chagrin*).

That hurts! . . . I mean nothing! . . . but she's a sick girl . . . I must make allowances . . .

PROFESSOR LEEDS (*thinking distractedly*).

That look in her eyes . . . hate! . . . (*with a silly giggle*)

Really, Nina, you're absolutely rude! What has Charlie done?

NINA (*in her cool tone*).

Why nothing. Nothing at all (*She goes to him with a detached, friendly manner.*) Did I seem rude, Charlie? I didn't mean to be. (*She kisses him with a cool, friendly smile.*) Welcome home. (*Thinking wearily*)

What has Charlie done? Nothing . . . and never will . . . Charlie sits beside the fierce river, immaculately timid, cool and clothed, watching the burning, frozen naked swimmers drown at last . . .

A few lines later her father chides her for snubbing Marsden:

NINA (*slowly—cooly and reflectively*).

Well, the war is over. Coming back safe from Europe isn't such an unusual feat now, is it?

MARSDEN (*thinking bitterly*).

A taunt . . . I didn't fight . . . physically fit . . . not like Gordon . . . Gordon in flames . . . how she must resent my living! . . . thinking of me, scribbling in press bureaus . . . louder and louder lies . . . drown the guns and the screams . . . deafen the world with lies . . . hired choir of liars!

There are a number of rather lengthy speeches of exposition which O'Neill apparently felt were necessary. These patches of information, as if hurriedly written, bear very little resemblance to natural speech. For instance, Professor Leeds explains to Marsden why he didn't want Nina to marry Gordon, an explanation that would not have been news to an old family friend. Another and better example is Mrs. Evans' long explanation of the insanity strain in the family to prove to Nina why she must not bear a child by her son, Sam Evans.

Nina voices a number of O'Neill's interests and observations which hardly seem to belong to this attractive but neurotic New England girl. For instance, she says:

"Do you know what I was doing upstairs? I was trying to pray. I tried hard to pray to the modern science God. I thought of a million light years to a spiral nebulae—one other universe among innumerable others. But how could that God care about our trifling misery of death-born-of-birth? . . . I wanted to believe in any God at any price—a heap of stones, a mud image, a drawing on a wall, a bird, a fish, a snake, a baboon—or even a good man preaching the simple platitudes of truth, those Gospel words we love the sound of but whose meaning we pass on to spooks to live by!"

The scene in which Nina expresses her resentment against the Puritan

code which kept her virtuous, a crucial scene in the play because it explains the central problem of her character, is again marred by a kind of garrulous repetition. O'Neill by overstatement and protest tried to achieve the full impact of the situation but seems to have lost it in too many words. A small part of the scene follows:

PROFESSOR LEEDS (*bitterly*). Yes, how ridiculous! It seems to me when you gave him your love, he got more than he could ever have hoped—

NINA (*with fierce contempt*). I gave him? What did I give him? It's what I didn't give! That last night before he sailed—in his arms until my body ached—kisses until my lips were numb—knowing all that night—something in me knowing he would die, that he would never kiss me again—knowing this so surely yet with my cowardly brain lying, no, he'll come back and marry you, you'll be happy ever after and feel his children at your breast looking up with eyes so much like his, possessing eyes so happy in possessing you! (*Then violently*) But Gordon never possessed me! I'm still Gordon's silly virgin! And Gordon is muddy ashes! And I've lost my happiness forever! All that last night I knew he wanted me. I knew it was only the honorable code-bound Gordon, who kept commanding from his brain, no, you mustn't, you must respect her, you must wait till you have a marriage license! (*She gives a mocking laugh.*)

When *Mourning Becomes Electra* (1929, 1931) was first produced, critics exhausted superlatives but a few independent writers saw it as another magnificent aim which failed to reach its goal. And yet, in spite of its weaknesses, it remains one of the most distinguished plays by any American dramatist. One example will indicate how O'Neill failed to write dialogue equal to a situation he had created. In the scene when Mannon, just home from the war, tells Christine about his view of death, and of the life he wants before it closes, the scene is heightened because of Vinnie's awareness of her father's danger, and because of the audience's knowledge of Christine's intentions to poison her husband. Charged with horror, it is a scene which demands dialogue of the highest order. It does seem, however, that Mannon's are not the lines a man would have spoken in such circumstances. They are like lengthy, discursive parts of a letter he might have written. Mannon says to Christine, his wife:

"That's always been the Mannon's way of thinking. They went to the white meetinghouse on Sabbaths and meditated on death. Life was a dying. Being born was starting to die. Death was being born. . . . I thought about my life—lying awake nights—and about your life. In the middle of battle I'd think maybe in a minute I'll be dead. But my life as just me ending, that didn't appear worth a thought one way or another. But listen, me as your husband being killed that seemed queer and wrong—like something dying that had never

lived. Then all the years we've been man and wife would rise up in my mind and I would try to look at them. But nothing was clear except that there'd always be some barrier between us—a wall hiding us from each other! I would try to make up my mind exactly what that wall was but I could never discover. . . . Maybe you've always known you didn't love me. I call to mind the Mexican war. I could see you wanted me to go. . . . When I came back you'd turned to your new baby, Orin. I was hardly alive for you any more. I saw that. I tried not to hate Orin. I turned to Vinnie, but a daughter's not a wife. Then I made up my mind I'd do my work in the world and leave you alone in your life and not care. That's why shipping wasn't enough—why I became judge and a mayor and such vain truck, and why folks in town look on me as so able! Ha! Able for what? Not for what I wanted most in life! Not for your love! No! Able only to keep my mind from thinking what I'd lost!"

At such a crucial point in the play a rehearsal of so much past history seems very much out of place, artificially holding up action that is imminent. O'Neill, by scattering attention with so much exposition, obscured the dramatic irony inherent in some of Mannon's words.

The Iceman Cometh (1946) seems to be a series of confessions, lengthy and leisurely, the most unusual one being that of Hickey who, at the end of the play, explained how he freed himself by murdering his wife. With few interruptions, it lasts for about twelve pages. This very long monologue brings to the audience the history of his delinquency and his wife's forbearance. There is also much talk in the play about the danger of pipe dreams, and the repetition of this theme at times wears a bit thin. Perhaps because of the type of characters, the lines are unusually well spiced with "hell" and "damn" and ejaculatory references to God. One example from Hickey suggests how extended these lines can be, so sadly in need of editing:

"... But I didn't mean booze. I meant save you from pipe dreams. I know now, from my experience, they're the things that really poison and ruin a guy's life and keep him from finding any peace. If you knew how free and contented I feel now. I'm like a new man. And the cure for them is so damned simple, once you have the nerve. Just the old dope of honesty is the best policy—honesty with yourself, I mean. Just stop lying about yourself and kidding yourself about tomorrows. (*He is staring ahead of him now* . . .) Hell, this begins to sound like a damned sermon on the way to lead a good life. Forget that part of it. It's in my blood, I guess. My old man used to whale salvation into my heine with a birch rod. He was a preacher in the sticks of Indiana, like I've told you. I got my knack of sale gab from him, too. He was the boy who could sell those Hoosier hayseeds. . . ."

Long Day's Journey Into Night, on the other hand, written before 1941, published in 1956, cuts close to the bone. Tensions frequently

erupt in family arguments and when they do, the dialogue is spare and sharp, as for instance:

JAMIE (*contemptuously*). Hardy only charges a dollar. That's what makes you think he's a fine doctor!

TYRONE (*stung*). That's enough! You're drunk now! There's no excuse—(*He controls himself—a bit defensively.*) If you mean I can't afford one of the fine society doctors who prey on the rich summer people—

JAMIE. Can't afford? You're one of the biggest property owners around here.

TYRONE. That doesn't mean I'm rich. It's all mortgaged—

JAMIE. Because you always buy more instead of paying off mortgages. If Edmund was a lousy acre of land you wanted, the sky would be the limit!

TYRONE. That's a lie. And your sneers against Dr. Hardy are lies! He doesn't put on frills, or have an office in a fashionable location, or drive around in an expensive automobile. That's what you pay for with those other five-dollar-to-look-at-your-tongue fellows, not their skill.

Out of her suffering Mary talks of the past. The talk is not mere factual history, but a comment on what life has done to her. Indirectly the audience learns what it needs to know through the horrible experience of this mother. Lines like the following are very different from the rhetorical outbursts which mar some of the previous plays. Mary speaks frankly to her husband about this same Dr. Hardy:

"Oh, we all realize why you like him, James. Because he's cheap! But please don't try to tell me! I know all about Dr. Hardy. Heaven knows I ought to after all these years. He's an ignorant fool! There should be a law to keep men like him from practicing. He hasn't the slightest idea—When you're in agony and half insane, he sits and holds your hands and delivers sermons on will power! (*Her face is drawn in an expression of intense suffering by the memory. For the moment, she loses all caution. With bitter hatred.*) He deliberately humiliates you! He makes you beg and plead! He treats you like a criminal! He understands nothing! And yet it was exactly the same type of cheap quack who first gave you the medicine—and you never knew what it was until too late! (*Passionately*) I hate doctors! They'll do anything—anything to keep you coming to them. They'll sell their souls. What's worse, they'll sell yours, and you never know it till one day you find yourself in hell!"

It is obvious that when O'Neill worked from experience and observation, when he let the characters speak for themselves, and out of themselves, he wrote some of his best dialogue. When he worked on a grander scale, his handling of the spoken word was pretentious and verbose. Joseph Wood Krutch comments on the magnificence of

Mourning Becomes Electra and its weaknesses, and relates Eugene O'Neill to the time in which he wrote:

Here is a scenario to which the most soaring eloquence and the most profound poetry are appropriate, and if it were granted us we should be swept aloft as no Anglo-Saxon audience since Shakespeare's time has had an opportunity to be. But no modern is capable of language really worthy of O'Neill's play, and the lack of that one thing is the penalty we must pay for living in an age which is not equal to more than prose.⁴

4. Joseph Wood Krutch, "Introduction," *Nine Plays by Eugene O'Neill* (New York, 1932), p. xxi.

SIGNI FALK

DESIRE UNDER THE ELMS, A MODERN TRAGEDY

MANY CRITICS OF O'NEILL have commented on *Desire Under the Elms* as marking a turning point in his development as a dramatist. Some have seen it as O'Neill's expression of extreme violence represented in brutal characters who exemplify "greed, lechery, incest, adultery, revenge, murder." O'Neill "... declared them good, and sanctified them."¹ This emphasis on all forms of violence and human degradation is the critical counterpart of popular public revulsion which reached its height in Los Angeles where the whole cast of the play was arrested, tried and convicted of giving a public performance of a play that was "mere smut, and filth . . . , morbid, lewd and obscene."² From this psychological approach the critic and the public indicate that in this play O'Neill had made a new departure into the lower depths of the psyche. They find it false, revolting, and since it sets its approval on bestiality, it deserves the moral condemnation it receives.

Another critical attack sees the play as centered on overblown pride that balks at no crime to achieve its own ends. In this view Ephraim "has dedicated his entire life to God, who is, of course, only an image of his own ego."³ From this it follows that all the characters who come in contact with Ephraim are sacrificed to his lust for power. His God is in the rocks, hard, uncompromising and pitiless. This judgment of the play is based on the Aristotelian theory of *hamartia*, and so marks a turning point in O'Neill's conception of tragedy. According to this idea, there must be a "flaw" and the "flaw" must account for the hero's "fall."

Joseph Wood Krutch also emphasizes *Desire Under the Elms* as a turning point in O'Neill's development as a dramatist. He regards it as the first play "which clearly revealed the kind of artistic problem with which O'Neill's genius was destined to grapple."⁴ His conception of the "problem" deals with the manner in which O'Neill succeeded in divorcing the action from the reality of the particular, and thereby concentrating on the interpretation of the abstract, or the idea. By this approach he lifts the play out of the muck of detail to which moralistic criticism is inevitably attached. He considered the play as "interested less in New England as such than in an aspect of the eternal tragedy of man and his

1. Edward A. Engel, *The Haunted Heroes of Eugene O'Neill* (Cambridge, Mass., 1953), p. 126.

2. *Nation*, CXXII (1926), p. 549.

3. Doris V. Falk, *Eugene O'Neill and the Tragic Tension* (New Brunswick, 1958), p. 95.

4. Joseph Wood Krutch, "Introduction," *Nine Plays by Eugene O'Neill* (New York, 1954), p. xvi.

passions."⁵ He holds that "the events really occur out of place and out of time."

This, however, is only a prelude to the real difference between *Desire Under the Elms* and the earlier plays. In this play, for the first time, O'Neill begins to see the problem of tragedy in modern drama as opposed to the classical and traditional interpretation. In this play he departs from the traditional interpretations of Aristotle, a departure that made it possible to develop his later and greater tragedies such as *Mourning Becomes Electra*, *The Iceman Cometh*, and *Long Day's Journey Into Night*.

O'Neill had, of course, read Aristotle's *Poetics*, but it does not follow that he studied the *Poetics*, analyzed twenty centuries of criticism, and then exemplified his own theory in a conscious dramatic structure. He began in a simpler manner, as no doubt Sophocles did, by seeking an answer to man's relation to the invisible forces that control his destiny. "I am interested only in the relation between man and God," states a point of view that O'Neill expressed many times in many different ways, but always emphasizing the essential and the only problem that is inseparable from any theory of tragedy.

In his notes to *Mourning Becomes Electra* O'Neill states the problem, recognizing that a modern version of the Electra story needs a psychological equivalent which in turn requires a modern conception of tragedy. By the time he wrote this play he had formulated his theory, but it was in *Desire Under the Elms* that he first conceived of tragedy as based on a theory of life and art that rests upon an idea, "a way of life"⁶ as Abercrombie states it.

The difference between a modern theory of tragedy as exemplified in drama from Ibsen and Strindberg to O'Neill is that it discards all the superficial requirements of a tragedy as set forth by Aristotle. Of course one should not forget that Aristotle was applying an inductive method to the analysis of Greek practice, and not laying down laws as was assumed by the neo-classics. This is not news, but neither is it an accepted fact that modern tragedy has entirely escaped from the Aristotelian "laws" and the moral implications of *hamartia*.

Such substantial critics of O'Neill as Engel, Falk and Eric Bentley make their judgment within the moral limits of the traditional Aristotelian framework. Even when Bentley can not like O'Neill⁷ because he can't do a successful stage production, it is quite obvious that his real difficulty lies in his inability to grasp O'Neill's concept of tragedy. Miss Falk's study of "The Tragic Tension" is penetrating and profound even when it assumes that O'Neill accepted the moral view of *hamartia*,

5. *Ibid.*

6. Lascelles Abercrombie, *Principles of Literary Criticism* (London, 1932), p. 99.

7. Eric Bentley, *In Search of Theatre* (New York, 1953), pp. 233-247.

which he certainly did not. On this point he followed Ibsen and Strindberg, and in following them he violated the doctrine so hallowed by tradition that it is very nearly sacred.

No recent critic has developed the contrast between the classical and the modern on this issue better than Whitman⁸ in his study of Sophocles. He rejects Aristotle's interpretation of the tragic hero as in some way or other deserving his fall from good fortune to bad because of a flaw in his character, a frailty, or an error in judgment. This as the traditional approach was never better stated than by Butcher in his rejection of Ibsen's plays:

Some quality of greatness in the situation as well as in the characters appears to be all but indispensable, if we are to be raised above the individual suffering and experience a calming instead of a disquieting feeling at the close. The tragic katharsis requires that suffering shall be exhibited in one of its comprehensive aspects; that the deeds and fortunes of the actors shall attach themselves to larger issues, and the spectator himself be lifted above the special case and brought face to face with universal law and the divine plan of the world.⁹

This is the very essence of the traditional approach to tragedy. Butcher has carried the moral interpretation of *hamartia* to its logical conclusion and perhaps the inescapable conclusion implied by Aristotle. It provides a perfect escape from the grim truth that tragedy does not justify a moral order or "a divine plan of the world." This interpretation of the flaw makes the unbelievable assumption that the moral failure or error in judgment justifies the fearful doom that falls upon the tragic hero. It sings a lullaby of dawn after the midnight storm, it offers a pious, little Sunday school moral and actually implies that Sophocles, Shakespeare and O'Neill saw man's tragic conflict in the terms of piety divorced from reason. Whatever Aristotle may have meant by katharsis or for that matter by pity and fear it must have been something greater than this Victorian sense of pious acceptance of a divine order. And it is that something more that lays the foundation for modern tragedy in Strindberg and Ibsen, and this is more fully developed in a conscious conception of tragedy by O'Neill.

2

In *Desire Under the Elms* the tragic hero is a man apart from other men. He does not accept their manner of living, their morality is beneath his contempt, their ideals are to him the petty dreams of weaklings and cowards. He despises his weak and loutish sons, he scorns the morality so valuable to all those who work in the market place for profit, the

8. Cedric H. Whitman, *Sophocles—A Study of Heroic Humanism* (Cambridge, Mass., 1951), pp. 22-41.

9. Samuel H. Butcher, *Aristotle's theory of Poetry and Fine Art* (New York, 1951), p. 271.

church and the dogma it represents is not even worthy of mention, the legal system with its special morality he uses, but only to further his own end. As a man he stems from Ibsen's Brand and the supreme and powerful pride of Strindberg. He is as proud as any man who ever walked onto a stage demanding an answer from the unanswerable. Like Job he wants to know why, with this difference that he knows he must become like the rocks and the hills if he would know God, and then he would be like Him, perhaps even equal to Him.

3

As a drama every scene in *Desire Under the Elms* is developed with skill to enhance and clarify the nature and meaning of the tragic hero. All other characters are made small in contrast. The two older sons are ignorant and loutish. Eben is a complex of delicate and sentimental love for the memory of his dead mother. Mixed with this emotion is a passion for the farm which is nothing more than a superficial attitude learned from his father. He will steal in the name of his mother to acquire his brother's rights to the land. He will desecrate her love in the company of a whore; he will commit incest and console himself with the thought that the restless spirit of his mother finds peace at last in the approval of his action. Abbie has no fixed value by which she can live. Greed, ambition, power and carnal love are so mixed in her behavior that she never finds a principle by which she can reconcile her practice with a fixed standard of conduct.

Within this network of ignorance and doubtful values that form the outer framework of the plot the character of Ephraim stands hard as the rocks that represent God. He knows that God and the rocks are one, that if he would know God he must know the rocks of the field that are the voice and spirit of God. "God is hard. He ain't easy" is the all-enveloping idea of the play, and the plot is the arrangement of characters in action to emphasize this truth as the all-enveloping idea of man and his world.

This man is a giant in comparison with the human beings who surround him. There is never any suggestion in the play that anyone, either man or woman, understood him. In his presence they can conceal neither their fear nor their awe. He was larger, stronger, older, more daring than other men. He encompassed in his being an understanding of life that embraced all living things. He was a part of the stony hills, the blue sky, the changing seasons; age did not weaken him, and the laws and the morality that are necessary to the essential weakness of most human beings were nonexistent for him. The sense of guilt, sin, and the fear of the law before which other characters of the play cringe, never crossed the threshold of his mind or touched him with either

sorrow or regret. He lived in the presence of God as manifested in the stones on his farm. He read the lessons of these stones as the true symbol of God's reality: cold, impersonal, strong, powerful, everlasting; a God untouched and unmoved by the petty, sensuous needs of men. Their pitiful cries for help, their intermittent faith, their identification with the soft and the sentimental was scorned by Ephraim as the God he understood so well also scorned them.

There are four scenes in Part I. Not until near the end of Scene Four does Ephraim appear, yet he dominates the actions and the thoughts of his three sons in the preceding scenes. The older sons are longing to escape from "makin' stone walls fur him to fence us in!" From that reference to "stones atop o' stones" and "Him," Ephraim dominates the action although he is not there in person. He had left the farm two months before. "Hitched up an' druv off into the West." They are puzzled by his queer behavior in leaving the place for the first time in thirty years. Simeon recognized a strange power, an unexplained force which he calls "Somethin'—driving him—t' drive us." He told his son why he was going, but to the younger man's dull mind it had no meaning. As Simeon recalls it his father was "lookin' kinder queer an' sick," and saying "I been hearin' the hens cluckin' an' the roosters crowin' all the durn day. I been lisenin' t' the cows lowin' an' everthin' else kickin' up till I can't stand it no more. It's spring an' I am feelin' damned. . . . An' now I'm ridin' out t' learn God's message t' me in the spring, like the prophets done."

His sons scorn his avowed purpose, but he was speaking a deep conviction of his own. A little less than fifty years before, he had fled from the stones to seek an easy life in the rich lands of the Mississippi valley. Ephraim tells Abbie that as his crops in the rich soil began to flourish he heard the voice of God saying, "This hain't wuth nothin' to Me," and goes on to say, "God's hard, not easy! God's in the stones! Build my church on a rock—out of stones an' I'll be in them! That's what He meant t' Peter! . . . Stones."

In his seeking for identification with the God of Stone, he was set apart from other human beings. He neither shared in their lives nor felt bound by their laws. They in turn could not enter into his (Ibsen) Brand-like conception of man's relations to God. He married and his wife bore him two sons. "She was a good woman. She wuked hard. We was married twenty year. She never knowed me. She helped but she never knowed what she was helpin'. I was allus lonesome. She died." He took a second wife. "She never knowed me for nothin'. It was lonesomer 'n hell with her. After a matter o' sixteen odd years, she died." His sons grew up hating him and coveting the farm not knowing what they coveted; not knowing as Ephraim knew that possession of the farm was

equal to the knowledge of God. Then he went forth in the spring to listen to the voice of the Prophets and he found a third wife who for a fleeting instant seemed to grasp the meaning of the farm and then lost it to a calculated carnal desire, because, she like all the others, did not know that this stony stronghold of Ephraim and God could not be possessed by love, illegal or otherwise.

As Part II develops, the battle of love and greed between Abbie and Eben controls the action. It seems to have turned away from Ephraim. He is lost once more in the wilderness of his lonesome world. While Abbie is plotting to deceive him, he makes a last effort to enlist her sympathy and understanding. "Then this spring the call come—the voice o' God cryin' in my wilderness, in my lonesomeness—t' go out an' seek an' find! (Turning to her with strange passion) I sought ye an' I found yel Yew air my Rose O' Sharon! Yer eyes air like. . . ." He gives up trying to make her understand.

In the blank ignorance of her expression Ephraim realizes that she, like his other wives, like his sons, does not understand his vision of God, his desire to become like God, hard as stone. In disgust he leaves her to join the cows in the barn. They are close to nature. They have accepted God as a stone. "They'll give me peace." But in leaving the scene he only emphasizes the fact that he dominates it. The next two scenes bring the lovers together. They believe that in deceiving Ephraim they have avenged Eben's mother. But the closing scene of Part II shows Ephraim contemplating the beauty of the sky and completely scornful of Eben's petty sense of triumph, which he senses without knowing exactly what its source is.

As the play moves to its conclusion in Part III all the action seems to center on the fearful clash between Eben and Abbie. Hate, fear, greed and love dominate their thoughts, feelings and action. It seems for a time as though they had finally taken over the play and the tragedy belonged to them. Then once more the shadow of the rock which is Ephraim looms over them like the ominous shadows of the elms that cover the house of Cabot. The lovers in their attempt to destroy Ephraim destroy themselves. Their end is ignominious defeat. Their actions are ignorant and cowardly. Their cringing acceptance of their fate deserves the towering contempt of Ephraim.

He in turn suffers a moment of weakness. It seems to him that at last the forces against him have won the battle. He has freed the cattle from the barn. "I'll set fire t' house an' barn an' watch 'em burn, an' I'll leave yer Maw t' haunt the ashes, an' I'll will the fields back t' God, so nothin' human kin never touch 'em!"

He finds that Eben had stolen his money, so his easy plan to escape fails. His moment of weakness is over. He turns back to God. "I kin

feel I be in the palm of His hand, His fingers guidin' me. It's a-goin' t' be lonesomer now than ever it war afore— . . . Waal—what d'ye want? God's lonesome, hain't He? God's hard an' lonesome!"

The Sheriff comes to take away the sin-sick, contrite lovers. Ephraim is to be left alone with the farm, the stones and God. He is seventy-five years old, he has had three wives and three sons. They have all, each in his own way, betrayed him. Through their weakness, their inability to understand that Nature has no special concern for their well-being, they deserted him.

4

In the character of Ephraim, O'Neill has developed a modern tragedy. The traditional conception of the tragic hero with his flaw, the idea of purification through suffering, the sense of a divine order based on the punishment of evil and reward for the good—all this is irrelevant to the tragedy of this play. Ephraim has a sense of the ultimate realities, the forces that relate man to the physical world. He senses the need for a living force in the inanimate earth, and he knows that it is hard as stone and as impersonal as the wind. He listens to the voice of nature, he is exalted by her beauty, and he identifies himself with the quality of lonesomeness which must be the character of power divorced from purpose.

His God of stone embodies the spirit of the earth from which mankind has its being. It brings forth the life that flourishes for a moment on the stony hillside under the blue sky in the warmth of the sun. As it brings to life the spirit of man, it likewise invites him to his doom. There is no escape either from birth or death. All this is part of Ephraim's character. In his futile battle to know God's way and be like God he is doomed to defeat; in his determination never to submit or yield, he is heroic. In this struggle that has dominated his life he can never win. At the age of seventy-five, he walks out into the stony fields, in to the beauty of dawn.

His great pride, one of the most hackneyed "flaws" in all criticism of tragedy, is no "frailty" in his character. It is pride that sustains him, it is by pride that he has endured his failures, it has strengthened him in his search for God. Not through humility but by pride does man attain his true humanity as a being that measures the extent of his universe and develops the courage to face his doom. Ephraim's exit is heroic. "Waal—what d'ye want? God's lonesome hain't He? God's hard an' lonesome."

SOPHUS KEITH WINTHER

r
e
s
a
e
a
o
y
.
f
e
e
e
e
a
e
s
-
l
e
s
o
.
o
s
f
l.
f
s
s
s
d
l
-
-